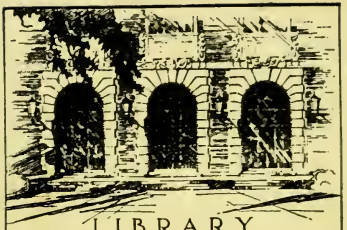

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BROKEN TO HARNESS

A Story of English Domestic Life

BY

EDMUND YATES

"Mit dem Gürtel, mit dem Schleier,
Reisst der schöner Wahn entzwei."

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
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TO

THE MARQUIS CLANRICARDE, K.P.

IN REMEMBRANCE

OF

CONSTANT KINDNESS.

PREFACE.

As the name of the Author of this book may be more or less familiar to a certain portion of the reading public, it is right to say that, with the exception of an incomplete sketch published years ago in a defunct periodical, this is his first attempt at Novel-writing.

It is a great pleasure to him to think that his first story should have appeared in a Magazine with which he has been editorially connected since its commencement, and in which he hopes very shortly to break fresh ground.

KENSINGTON,
November 1864.

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BROKEN TO HARNESS.

CHAPTER I.

MR. CHURCHILL'S IDEAS ARE MONASTIC.

THE office of the *Statesman* daily journal was not popular with the neighbours, although its existence unquestionably caused a diminution of rent in its immediate proximity. It was very difficult to find—which was an immense advantage to those connected with it, as no one had any right there but the affiliated; and strangers burning to express their views, or to resent imaginary imputations cast upon them, had plenty of time to cool down while they wandered about the adjacent lanes in vain quest of their object. If you had business there, and were not thoroughly acquainted with the way, your best plan was to

take a sandwich in your pocket, to prepare for an afternoon's campaign, and then to turn to the right out of Fleet Street, down any street leading to the river, and to wander about until you quite unexpectedly came upon your destination. There you found it, a queer, dumpy, black-looking old building,—like a warehouse that had been sat upon and compressed,—nestling down in a quaint little dreary square, surrounded by the halls of Worshipful Companies which had never been heard of save by their own Liverymen, and large churches with an average congregation of nine, standing mildewed and blue-mouldy, with damp voters'-notices peeling off their doors, and green streaks down the stuccoed heads of the angels and cherubim supporting the dripping arch over the porch, in little dank reeking churchyards, where the rank grass overtopped the broken tombstones, and stuck nodding out through the dilapidated railing.

The windows were filthy with the stains of a thousand showers; the paint had blistered and peeled off the heavy old door, and round the gap-

ing chasm of the letter-box; and in the daytime the place looked woebegone and deserted. Nobody came there till about two in the afternoon, when three or four quiet-looking gentlemen would drop in one by one, and after remaining an hour or two, depart as they had come. But at night the old house woke up with a roar; its windows blazed with light; its old sides echoed to the creaking throes of a huge steam-engine; its querulous bell was perpetually being tugged; boys in paper caps and smeary faces and shirt-sleeves were perpetually issuing from its portals, and returning, now with fluttering slips of paper, now with bibulous refreshment. Messengers from the Electric Telegraph Companies were there about every half-hour; and cabs that had dashed up with a stout gentleman in spectacles dashed away with a slim gentleman in a white hat, returning with a little man in a red beard, and flying off with the stout gentleman again. Blinds were down all round the neighbourhood; porters of the Worshipful Companies, sextons of the congregationless churches, agents for printing-ink and

Cumberland black-lead, wood-engravers, box-block sellers, and the proprietors of the Never-say-die or Health-restoring Drops, who held the corner premises,—were all sleeping the sleep of the just, or at least doing the best they could towards it, in spite of the reverberation of the steam-engine at the office of the *Statesman* daily journal.

On a hot night in September Mr. Churchill sat in a large room on the first-floor of the *Statesman* office. On the desk before him stood a huge battered old despatch-box, overflowing with papers—some in manuscript, neatly folded and docketed; others long printed slips, scored and marked all over with ink-corrections. Immediately in front of him hung an almanack and a packet of half-sheets of note-paper, strung together on a large hook. A huge waste-paper basket by his side was filled, while the floor was littered with envelopes of all sizes and colours, fragments cut from newspapers, ink-splashes, and piles of books in paper parcels waiting for review. A solemn old clock, pointing to midnight, ticked gravely on the mantelpiece; a small library of

grim old books of reference, in solemn brown bindings, with the flaming cover of the Post-Office Directory like a star in the midst of them, was ranged against the wall; three or four speaking tubes, with ivory mouthpieces, were curling round Mr. Churchill's feet; and Mr. Churchill himself was reading the last number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by the light of a shaded lamp, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a cheery voice said,

"Still at the mill, Churchill? still at the mill?"

"Ah, Harding, my dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you!"

"I should think you were," said Harding, laughing; "for my presence here means a good deal to you,—bed, and rest, and country, eh? Well, how have you been?—not knocked up? You've done capitally, my boy! I've watched you carefully, and am more than content." (For Mr. Harding was the editor of the *Statesman*, and Churchill, one of his principal contributors, had been taking his place while he made holiday.)

"That's a relief," said Churchill. "I've been rather nervous about it; but I thought that Tooby and I between us had managed to push the ship along somehow. Tooby's a capital fellow!"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Harding, seating himself; "Tooby is a capital fellow, and there's not a better 'sub' in London. But Tooby couldn't have written that article on the Castle-Hedingham dinner, or shown up the *Teaser's* blunders in classical quotation, Master Frank. *Palmam qui meruit.* Who did the Bishops and the Crystal Palace?"

"Oh, Slummer wrote those. Weren't they good?"

"Very smart; very smart indeed. A thought too strong of Billingsgate, though. That young man is a very hard hitter, but wants training. Where's Hawker?"

"Just gone. He's been very kind and very useful; so have Williams and Burke, and all. And you—how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Never so much in my life. I've read no-

thing but the paper. I've done nothing but lie upon the beach and play with the children."

"And the children—are they all right? and Mrs. Harding?"

"Splendid! I never saw the wife look so well for the last six years. She sent all kind remembrances to you, and the usual inquiry."

"What! if I was going to be married? No, no; you must take back my usual answer. She must find me a wife, and it must be one after her own pattern."

"Seriously, Frank Churchill, it's time you began to look after a wife. In our profession, especially, it's the greatest blessing to have some one to care for and to be petted by in the intervals of business-strife. There used to be a notion that a literary man required to be perpetually 'seeing life,' which meant 'getting drunk, and never going home;' but that's exploded, and I believe that our best character-painters owe half their powers of delineation to their wives' suggestions. Women,—by Jove, sir!—women read character wonderfully."

"Mrs. Harding has made a bad shot at mine, old friend," said Churchill, laughing, "if she thinks that I am in any way desirous to be married. No, no! So far as the seeing life is concerned, I began early, and all that has been over long since. But I've got rather a queer temper of my own. I'm not the most tolerant man in the world; and I've had my own way so long, that any little missy fal-lals and pettishness would jar upon me horribly. Besides, I've not got money enough to marry upon. I like my comforts, and to be able to buy occasional books and pictures, and to keep my horse, and my club, and—"

"Well, but a fellow like you might pick up a woman with money!" said Harding.

"That's the worst pick-up possible,—to have to be civil to your wife's trustees, or listen to reproaches as to how 'poor papa's money' is being spent. No, no, no! So long as my dear old mother lives, I shall have a decent home; and afterwards—well, I shall go into chambers, I suppose, and settle down into a club-haunting old fogey."

"Stuff, Frank; don't talk such rubbish. Affectation of cynicism and affectation of premature age are two of the most pernicious cants of the day. Very likely now, at the watering-place to which you're going for your holiday, you'll meet some pretty girl who—"

"Watering-place!" cried Frank, shouting with laughter; "I'm going to my old godfather's country place for some partridge-shooting; and as he's an old bachelor of very peculiar temper, there's not likely to be much womankind about."

"Ho, ho! A country place, eh? and partridge-shooting? Hum, hum! We're coming out. Don't get your head turned with grand people, Frank."

"Grand people!" echoed Churchill. "Don't I tell you the man's my godfather? There will probably be half a dozen men staying in the house, whose sole care about me will be that I carry my gun properly, and don't hit them out in the stubble."

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow, by the midday express. I've

some matters to settle in the morning, and can't get down before dinner-time."

"Well, then, get to bed at once. I've got to say a few words to Tooby; and I'll see Marks when he comes up with the statement, and take care that all's straight. You've seen your own proofs? Very well, then; God bless you! and be off, and don't let us see your face for a month."

They shook hands warmly; and as Churchill left the room, Harding called after him, "Two things, Frank: look out for a nice wife, and don't get your head turned with what are called 'swells.'"

Throughout London town there breathed no simpler-minded man than George Harding. At College, as in after-life, he had lived with a very small set, entirely composed of men of his own degree in the world; and of any other he had the vaguest possible notion. His intellectual acquirements were great, and his reading was vast and catholic; but of men and cities he had seen literally nothing; and as, except in his annual vacation, when he could go down with his family and potter about the quietest of watering-places, he

never went any where save from his home to the *Statesman* office, and from the *Statesman* office to his home, he was not likely to enlarge his knowledge of life. Occasionally, on a Saturday night in the season, he would get the Opera-box from the musical critic, and would take Mrs. Harding to Her Majesty's; but there his whole attention would be absorbed in contemplating the appearance and manners of the "swells,"—the one word not to be found in the dictionary which he sometimes indulged in. Slightly Radical in his opinions was George Harding; and that he was not much gratified by his observation of these specimens of the upper ten thousand, was to be traced in certain little pungencies and acerbities in his leading articles after these Opera visits. He worshipped his calling, in his own honest, simple, steadfast way, and resented, quietly but sturdily, any attempts at what he considered patronage by those of higher social rank. The leaders of his political party, recognisant of the good service done to them by Harding's pen, had, on several occasions, essayed to prove their gratitude by little set civilities:

huge cards of invitation to Lady Helmsman's Saturday-evening *réunions* had found their way to the *Statesman's* deep-mouthed letter-box; carriage-paid hampers of high-flavoured black game sped thither from the Highland shooting-box, where the Foreign Secretary was spending his hard-earned holiday; earliest intimation of political changes, in "confidential" covers, were conveyed there by Downing-Street messengers. But George Harding never appeared at Protocol House; his name never was seen low down amongst those of the Foreign-Office clerks and outer selvage of fashion, chronicled with such urbanity by Mr. Henchman of the *High-Life Gazette;* and no attention or flattery ever made him pander to a shuffle, or register a lie. He had a very high opinion of Churchill's talent and honour; but he knew him to be fond of praise, and, above all, greatly wanting in discretion. Harding had seen so many men full of promise fall into the dreary vortex of drink and debt and pot-house dissipation, that he had hailed with delight the innate decency and gentlemanly feeling which had kept Frank

Churchill out of such dirty orgies; but now he feared lest the disinfectant might prove even worse than the disease itself, and lest the aristocratic notions, which his friend undoubtedly possessed, might lead him into society where his manliness and proper pride might be swallowed up in the effulgency of his surroundings.

So mused George Harding, bending over the dingy old grate at the *Statesman* office, and gazing vacantly at the shavings with which it was filled, while waiting for Mr. Marks, the head printer, to bring him the "statement," showing the amount required to fill the paper. Meanwhile Churchill, cigar in mouth, was striding through the deserted streets, rejoicing in the thought of his coming holiday, and inwardly chuckling over his friend's warnings. At last he stopped at a door in a dull respectable street leading out of Brunswick Square, let himself in with a latch-key, drank a tumbler of soda-water, and glanced at the addresses of some letters in his little dining-room, exchanged his boots for slippers at the bottom of the staircase, and crept slowly up the stairs. As he arrived at

the second floor, he paused for a minute, and a voice said, "God bless you, Frank!"

"God bless you, mother!" he replied; "good night, dear;" and passed into his room.

Then he sat himself on the side of his bed, and began leisurely to undress himself, smiling meanwhile.

"Bring back a wife, and beware of swells, eh? That is the essence of Harding's advice. No, no, my darling old mother; you and I get on too well together to change our lives. An amusing time a wife would have with me,—out half the night at the office, and she shivering in the dining-room waiting my return. Wife, by Jove! Yes; and thick fat chops, and sixteen-shilling trousers, and the knifeboard of the omnibus instead of the cob to ride on! No; I think not. And as for swells —that old republican, Harding, thinks every man with a handle to his name is an enemy to Magna Charta. I should like to show him my old godfather walking into an idiotic peer of the realm!"

And, very much tickled at the idea, Churchill put out his candle and turned in.

CHAPTER II.

DOWN AT BISSETT.

At the very first sign of the season's breaking up, Sir Marmaduke Wentworth was in the habit of leaving his town-house in Curzon Street, and proceeding to his country-seat of Bissett Grange. Gumble, his butler and body-servant, was the first person officially informed of the intended flight; but long before his master spoke to him, that far-seeing man had made up his mind, and arranged his plans accordingly. "Flitherses gone to-day, eh!" he would say to himself, as, in the calm, cool evening, he lounged against the jams of the street-door (Gumble was never seen in the area) and looked up to the opposite house. "Shutters up, and Flitherses hoff! Some German bath or other, no doubt; elber-shakin' for the old man, and forrin' counts for the young ladies. Lord Charles leff

last week; he'll be takin' his rubber at Spaw now as nateral as at the Club. The old Barrin has been sent away somewheres; and I'll bet a pound in two days my guv'nor says 'Hoff!'" And he would have won his bet. So soon as there was the slightest appearance of a move among the people of his circle; so soon as he found "shall have left town" given as an answer to an invite to one of his cosey little dinners; before Goodwood afforded the pleasantest excuse for the laziest of racing and the happiest of lunching; while flannel-clad gentlemen yet perspired copiously at Lord's, defending the wickets of Marylebone against the predatory incursions of "Perambulators" or "Eccentrics;" when Finsburyites were returning from their fortnight at Ramsgate, and while Dalstonians yet lingered on the pier at Southend,—old Marmaduke Wentworth would give his household brigade the order to retreat, and, at their head, would march down upon Bissett Grange.

And he was right; for there was not a nobler old house, nor prettier grounds, in the broad county of Sussex, where it stood. Contrast is the great

thing, after all: tall men marry short women; the most thick-set nursery-maids struggle a-tiptoe to keep step with the lengthiest members of the Foot-Guards; Plimnims the poet, who is of the Sybarite-roseleaf order, sighs for Miss Crupper the *écuyère*, who calls a horse an oss, and a donkey a hass; and so you, if you had been staying at Brighton, and had gone on an excursion at half-a-crown an hour into the inner country, would have fallen in love with Bissett Grange. For, weary of the perpetual hoarse murmur of the sea, now thundering its rage in tremendous waves, now shrieking its lamentation in long hissing back-currents; sick of the monotony of the "long-backed bushless downs," so cold and bare and wind-swept, echoing to the eternal plaint of the curlew, and shutting off the horizon with a dreary never-ending shoulder-blade of blank turf,—you, if you were lucky in your choice, and had a driver with a soul beyond the Steine and aspirations exceeding the Lewes Road, would have come upon, at a distance of some five miles from Brighton, a little one-storied porter's lodge, nestling in ivy so deep

that the dear parasite had it in its embrace, chimneys and all. Big, heavy, and wooden were the lodge-gates; none of your pretty, light, elegant Coalbrookdale innovations. Gates, in Sir Marmaduke Wentworth's idea, were things to keep impertinent prying people out; and as such they could not be made too cumbrous or too opaque for his pleasure. They were very high, as well as very heavy; so, if you had come with your 'cute driver in your fly excursion, you would have seen nothing but the quaint twisted chimneys; and even for that view you must have mounted unto the box. Save the friends of the owner, no one, in Marmaduke Wentworth's time, had ever passed the lodge, or rather, I should say, reached the house. Visitors to Brighton and Worthing, dying of *ennui*, had besieged the lodge, and implored permission to walk in the grounds; artists had asked to be allowed to sketch the house; a "gentleman engaged upon the press" had written to say that he was sure there must be a legend connected with some chamber, if he might only be permitted to explore the mansion; and one man,

a photographer, bribed the lodge-keeper's granddaughter with a piece of elecampane, and, in the absence of the legitimate portress, passed the gate. He had proceeded about a couple of hundred yards up the avenue, when he was met by Sir Marmaduke, who had just turned out for his leisurely afternoon ride. The sight of the itinerant professor with his travelling camera roused the old gentleman in an instant; he set spurs to his cob, hurried off to the intruder, and tapped him smartly on the back with his whip. One instant's glance revealed to him the whole affair: it was *not* a travelling Punch, whom he would have sent into the kitchen; it was *not* a man from the Missionary Society, whom he would have had ducked in the pond; it was—*tant soit peu*—an artist; and for art of any kind, however humble, old Marmaduke had a regard. So when the trembling man looked up, and, divided between a notion of "cheeking the swell," or being impudent, and running away, or being cowardly, hit upon a middle course, and, guarding his head, at which nothing had been aimed, exclaimed, "Now, then! What are you

at? Who's hurting you?" all the old gentleman did was to bend from his saddle, to seize the intruder by the lobe of his ear, to turn him completely round, and, pointing to the gate, to utter in a hissing whisper the phrase "Go away, man!"

When the photographer attempted to explain, the ear-pressure was intensified, and the "Go away, man!" uttered more loudly; at the third repetition, the photographer wrung his ear from the old gentleman's fingers, and ran away abjectly.

"Collodion and Clumpsoles; or, the Homes of the British Aristocracy in the Camera: being Reminiscences of a Peripatetic Photographer," therefore, contained no view of Bissett Grange; which was to be regretted, as neither The Hassocks, the Rector's residence, nor The Radishes, the seat of Sir Hipson Hawes, the lord of the manor, both of which figured extensively in the photographic publication, was to be compared with Marmaduke Wentworth's ancestral mansion. The elm-avenue extended from the lodge to the house, —nearly half a mile,—and through the trees you saw the broad expanse of the park, covered with

that beautiful soft turf which is in the highest perfection in Sussex, and which afforded pasture for hundreds of dappled deer, who would raise their heads at the sound of approaching footsteps or carriage-wheels, and, after peering forward earnestly with outstretched necks at the intrusion, would wheel round and start off at a peculiar sling trot, gradually merging into the most graceful of gallops.

Immediately in front of the porch, and only divided from it by the carriage-sweep, was an enormous flower-bed, sloping towards the sides, and culminating in the centre,—the pride of the head-gardener's soul. Right and left of the house were two arches, exactly alike. Passing through that to the left, you came upon the stables and coach-houses, of which there is little to be said, save that they were old-fashioned, and what the helpers called "ill-conwenient;" and that the fine London grooms who came down with their master's hacks and carriage-horses in the autumn—Sir Marmaduke was never at Bissett during the hunting season—used to curse them freely as a set of tumble-

down old sheds, fit only for jobs and fly-'osses. And yet the old quadrangle, environed by the stable-buildings, with their red-tiled roofs and their slate-coloured half-hatch doors, each duly bearing its horse-shoe and its hecatomb of mouse and stoat skeletons, was picturesque, more especially of an evening, when the setting sun gleamed on the quaint old clock-turret, ivy-covered and swallow-haunted, and steeped in a rich crimson glow the pretty cottage of old Martin, erst head-groom, now a superannuated pensioner,—old Martin, who was never so happy as when babbling of bygone days, and who "minded the time" when the stables were full of blood horses, and when Master Marmaduke (the present proprietor) rode Saucy Sally over all the raspers in the county.

Through the other arch you came upon the gardens of the Grange. Immediately before you lay a broad expanse of lawn,—such smooth, soft turf as is only met with in England, and only there in well-to-do places. Short, crisp, and velvety was the grass, kept with the greatest care, and rolled and mown with the most undeviating

punctuality; for Sir Marmaduke was proud of his lawn, and liked to sit out there in his high-backed rustic seat on the hot August evenings, placidly smoking his cigar, and occasionally raising his head to be fanned by the soft sea-breeze which came blowing over the neighbouring downs. He would as soon have thought of allowing a servant to take a liberty with him as of permitting any one to drive a croquet-iron into that lawn, or to attempt to play any game on it. Between the house and the lawn ran a broad gravelled walk, passing down which you came upon the orchard and upon the fig-garden, which was the glory of the county, and was enclosed with an old red-brick wall, which itself looked ripe and ruddy. To the right lay the kitchen-garden,—a fertile slope of land in the highest state of cultivation, dotted every here and there with huge lights and frames, and spread nets, and overgrown cucumbers, and bursting marrows; for though Sir Marmaduke cared but little for flowers, he was a great fruit-grower, and, next to seeing his pines and melons on his own table (where, glowing on the

old ancestral Wentworth plate, they looked like a study for Lance), his great gratification was to bear away with them the prizes from the Horticultural Shows in the neighbourhood. Beyond the orchard was a large field, known as the Paddock, whither the croquet-players and the archers were relegated, and where the turf was almost as smooth as that of the sacred lawn itself. Over all—house, lawn, orchard, kitchen-garden, and paddock, and far away across the surrounding downs—there was a delicious sense of calm and quiet; a feeling which was heightened rather than lessened by the inhabitants of a rookery established in the tall elm-trees bordering the Paddock, and who, as they sailed over the grounds of the Grange, would express their approbation by one single solemn caw.

The house faced the avenue, and was a queer, odd, square block, by no means picturesque, but quaintly ugly, something like an old-fashioned child, whose decidedly curious features, out of all drawing and impossible to be admired, yet have something humorously lovable in their expression.

A staring red-brick house of Queen Anne's time, that ought to have been formal, and perhaps had been at some period or other, but which had undergone so many changes—had had so many gables put on here, and windows let in there, and rooms added on wherever they were wanted—as to lose all trace of its original design, and to have become of a composite style of architecture which would have driven Mr. Ruskin mad. It was the only gentleman's seat for miles round which was built of red brick, and not that gray stone which always looks weather-beaten and time-worn; instead of which, the Grange had a jolly, cheery, comic expression, and when the sun gleamed on its little diamond-shaped, leaden-casemented windows, they seemed to twinkle like the eyes of a genial red-faced old gentleman at some good joke or pleasant dish. A comfortable old house in every sense of the word, with an enormous number of rooms, large airy spacious chambers, queer little nooks and snuggeries, long passages with pannelled partitions dividing them from other passages, partitions with occasional square windows or round

eyelet-holes cut in them, wide straggling staircases with broad steps and broad balustrades, which no boy had ever yet been known to pass without sliding down them on his stomach. A couple of queer turreted chambers, like the place where the yard-measure lives in old-fashioned work-boxes, and a set of attics, low-roofed, and rather worm-eaten and mouldy-smelling. These were not inhabited, for the servants had their own quarters in the western wing; a bit of eccentric building, which had been thrown out long after the original structure, and gave to the old mansion, from the back view, a comical lopsided appearance; and when the rest of the house was filled, the bachelors were sent to what was known as the Barracks, or the Kennel, a series of jolly little rooms shut out from the respectable portion of the building by a long passage, where they kept up their own fun till a very late hour of the night, where there was always an overhanging smell of tobacco, and whence, in the early mornings, there came such a roaring and clanging of shower-baths, and such a sound of hissing and sluicing and splashing, that you might

have fancied yourself in the vicinity of an army of Tritons.

Two o'clock on a hot afternoon at the end of September; and, with the exception of a few sportsmen, who are now reclining under a high hedge and lighting pipes, after a succulent repast of game-pie, cold partridge, and bitter beer, all the party at the Grange is assembled round the luncheon-table in the dining-room. That is Marmaduke Wentworth, the tall old man standing on the hearthrug, with his back towards the empty fire-grate. His head is perfectly bald and shining, and has but a fringe of crisp white hair; his features are what is called "aristocratic," well-shaped, and comely; his eyes are cold, clear, gray; his lips slightly full, and his teeth sound and regular. He is in his invariable morning dress,—a blue coat with brass buttons, a buff waistcoat, and gray trousers with gaping dog's-eared pockets, into which his hands are always plunged. Looking at him now, you would scarcely recognise the *roué* of George the Fourth's time, the Poins to the wild Prince, the

hero of a hundred intrigues and escapades. In heat and turmoil, in drinking, dicing, and dancing, Marmaduke Wentworth passed his early youth; and from this debauchery he was rescued by the single passion of his life. The object of that passion—his cousin, a lovely girl, whose innocence won the dissipated roisterer from his evil ways, and gave him new notions and new hopes—died within three months of their engagement; and from that day Wentworth became another man. He went abroad, and for ten years led a solitary studious life; returning to England, he brought with him his bookworm tastes; and it was long before he emerged from the seclusion of Bissett Grange, which he had inherited, and returned once more to London life. Even then, he sought his society in a very different set to that in which he had previously shone. George the Great was dead; sailor King William had followed him to the grave; and the new men fluttering round the court of the new Queen, setting fashions and issuing social ordinances, had been

cradled children when Marmaduke Wentworth had copied Brummel's cravats, or listened to Alvanley's *bons mots*. Even had he continued a "dandy," he would have been displeased with the "swells" to whom the dandies had given place; and now, changed as he was into a disappointed elderly gentleman, with a bitter tongue and an intolerant spirit, his unsocial cynicism bored the new men, while their slangy flippancy disgusted him. So, in the phrase of the day, he "went in for a new excitement;" and, though his name and his appearance were as well known in London as those of the Duke of Wellington, there were but few people of his own status or time of life who were retained on an intimate footing. Some few old friends, who themselves had suffered heart-shipwreck, or seen their argosies of early feelings go down in sight of port, claimed companionship with the querulous, crotchety companion of their youth, and had their claims allowed. His odd, quaint savagery, his utter contempt for the recognised laws of politeness, his free speaking, and his general

eccentricity, had a great charm for young people of both sexes; and if they had any thing in them to elevate them above the ordinary run of yea-and-nay young persons, they invariably found their advances responded to. Then there was a great attraction for young people in the society which they met at one of Marmaduke's dinners,—men whose names were before the world; an occasional cabinet-minister sweetening the severities of office with a little pleasant relaxation in company where he might take the mask from his face and the gag from his mouth; authors of note; rising artists; occasionally an actor or two,—all these were to be found round Wentworth's table. The old gentleman was in London from January to July. During that time he gave four dinner-parties a week (one of them, I regret to say, and generally the pleasantest, on a Sunday), and during the other three days dined out. He was a member of the True-Blue and the Minerva Clubs, but seldom went to either; he was admissible by the hall-porter of every theatre in London, and

sometimes strayed behind the scenes and took possession of the green-room hearthrug, whence he vented remarkably free and discriminating criticisms on the actors and actresses surrounding him. He had one special butt, an old German baron of fabulous age, who was supposed to have been a page to Frederick the Great, who had been for thirty years in England, and had only acquired the very smallest knowledge of its language, and whose power of placidly enduring savage attacks was only equalled by the vigour of his appetite. The Baron was never brought down to Bissett; but, as we have heard from Gumble, was sent off to some seaside place to recruit his digestion; whence he invariably turned up again in Curzon Street in January, with the same wig, the same dyed beard, the same broken English, and an appetite, if any thing, improved by his marine sojourn.

There is a strange medley now collected at the Grange. That tall girl, seated at the far end of the table, with her chin leaning on her

hand, is Barbara Lexden. Three years ago, when, at nineteen, she was presented, she created a *furore;* and even now, though her first freshness is gone, she is even more beautiful—has rounded and ripened, and holds her own with the best in town. More *distingué*-looking than beautiful, though, is Barbara. Her face is a little too long for perfect oval; her nose is very slightly aquiline, with delicately curved, thin, transparent nostrils; her forehead marked with two deep lines, from a curious trick of elevating her eyebrows when surprised, and shaded with broad thick masses of dark-brown hair, bound tightly round her head, taken off behind her ears,—small, and glistening like pink shells,—and terminating in a thick plaited clump; sleepy, greenish-gray eyes, with long drooping lashes; a tall, undulating, pear-shaped figure, always seen to best advantage in a tight-fitting dress, with a neat little collar and nun-like simple linen cuffs; a swimming walk; feet and ankles beyond compare; and hands—ah, such hands!—not plump, slender, with long fin-

gers, and rosy filbert nails; such hands as Ninon de l'Enclos might have had, but such as, save on Barbara, I have only seen in wax, on black velvet, under a glass case, modelled from Lady Blessington's, and purchased at the Gore-House sale. Blue was her favourite colour, violet her favourite perfume, admiration the longing of her soul. She was never happy until every one with whom she was brought into contact had given in their submission to her. No matter of what age or in what condition of life, all must bow. Once, during a Commemoration Week at Oxford, she completely turned various hoary heads of houses, and caused the wife of an eminent Church dignitary, after thirty years of happy marriage, to bedew her pillow with tears of bitter jealousy at seeing how completely the courteous old dean was fascinated by the lovely visitor; and she would laugh with saucy triumph as she heard the blunt, outspoken admiration of working-men as she sat well forward in the carriage blocked up in St. James's Street on a Drawing-room day, or slowly

creeping along the line of vehicles which were "setting down" at the Horticultural-Gardens gates.

With the exception of flirtation, in which she would have taken the highest honours, her accomplishments were neither more nor less than those of most women of her position. She played brilliantly, with a firm dashing touch, and sang, perhaps not artistically, but with an amount of feeling thrown into her deep contralto that did frightful execution; her French was very good; her German passable, grammatical, and well phrased, but lacking the real rough accent and guttural smack. At all events, she had made the most of what schooling she had had, for it was desultory enough. Her father, the youngest son of a good family, ran away with the black-eyed, ruddy-cheeked daughter of the Herefordshire parson with whom he went to read during the Long Vacation; was immediately disinherited by his father; left the University, and by the influence of his family got into a Government office; where, by his own exertions, he got into bad company, into debt, and into prison. On

his deathbed he commended his wife and daughter to the care of his elder sister, who had never married, but lived very comfortably on the property which ought to have been his. Miss Lexden came once to see her brother's widow and orphan in the lodgings which they had taken in Lambeth to be near the King's Bench Prison. But years of trouble had not changed the poor mother for the better, and her stately sister-in-law regarded her with horror. In truth, the colour had faded from her rosy cheeks, and the light died out of her black eyes long ago, and had left her a dowdy, silly, fussy little woman, with nothing to say. So Miss Lexden thought she could best fulfil her brother's charge with least trouble to herself by allowing the bereaved ones fifty pounds a year; and on this, and what she could make by working for the Berlin-wool and fancy-stationery shops, the widow supported herself and her child for some twelve years, when she died. Miss Lexden then took the child to the dull, stately old house in Gloucester Place, Portman Square; where, with the aid of a toady, the daily visit of a smug phy-

sician, an airing in a roomy old carriage drawn by a couple of fat horses, a great deal of good eating and drinking, and a tolerable amount of society, she managed to lead a jolly godless old life. She found her niece, then fourteen years old, less ignorant and more presentable than she had imagined; for Barbara had received from her mother a sound English education, and had, on the pea-and-pigeon principle, picked up a little French and the rudiments of music. She looked and moved like a lady, and moreover had an insolence of manner, a *de haut en bas* treatment of nearly every body, which the old lady hailed as a true Lexden characteristic, and rejoiced over greatly. So Barbara was sent to Paris for three years, and came back at seventeen finished in education, ripened in beauty, and a thorough coquette at heart. Of course she had already had several *affaires:* several with the professors attached to the Champs-Elysées *pension;* one with an Italian count, who bribed the ladies'-maid to convey notes, and who was subsequently thrashed and instructed in the *savate* by the Auvergnat porter of

the establishment; and one with an English gentleman coming over from Boulogne; and her aunt used to encourage her to tell of these, and would laugh at them until the tears came into her eyes.

At nineteen she was presented, made her *coup*, and now for two seasons had been a reigning belle. Offers she had had in plenty,—youthful peers with slender incomes; middle-aged commoners, solemn, wealthy, and dull; smug widowers, hoping to renew the sweets of matrimony, and trusting to bygone experience to keep clear of its bitters. But Barbara refused them all; played with them, landed them,—giving them all the time the most pleasurable sensations of encouragement, as old Izaak used to tickle trout,—and then flung them back, bruised and gasping, into that muddy stream the world. She told her aunt she was playing for a high stake; that she did not care for any of these men; that she did not think she ever should care for any one; under which circumstances she had better make the best bargain of herself, and go at a high price. There are plenty of women like this. We rave against cruel parents and sordid

Mammon-matches; but very often the parents are merely passive in the matter. There are plenty of girls who have walnuts, or peach stones, or something equally impressible, where their hearts should be, who have never experienced the smallest glimmer of love, and who look upon the possession of a carriage and an Opera-box, and admission into high society, as the acme of human enjoyment.

Sitting next to Barbara is Fred Lyster, a slim dark man, with small regular features and a splendid flowing black beard. He was educated at Addiscombe, and was out in India under Gough and Outram; did good service, was highly thought of, and was thoroughly happy; when his old godfather died, and left him heir to a property of three thousand a year. He returned at once to England, and became the most idle, purposeless, dreamiest of men. He had tried every thing, and found it all hollow. He had travelled on the Continent, been on the turf, gambled in stocks and railways, kept a yacht, and was bored by each and all. He had thought of going into Parliament, and went for two nights into the Speaker's Gallery; but did

not pursue the idea, because he found that "the fellows talked so much." His plaintive moans against life were sources of intense amusement to his friends; and when he discovered this—which he did at once, being a very long way from a fool—he was not in the least annoyed, but rather lent himself to the idea, and heightened his expressions of *ennui* and despondency. He liked to be with Sir Marmaduke; for the old gentleman's brusque manners and general intolerance afforded him real amusement, and he laid himself open to attack by always being more than ever drawling and inane when in his company. The baronet, who had a quick perception of character, knew Lyster's real worth, and often talked to him seriously about having some purpose in life; and when he only got vague and dreamy replies, he would burst out into a torrent of invective, in the middle of which Lyster would run, shrieking with laughter, from the room.

Next to Captain Lyster sits Miss Lexden, Barbara's aunt; a fat, placid-looking old lady, in a flaxen front, which, with a cap covered with

ribbons and flowers, seemed skewered on to her skull by a couple of large pins, the knobs of which presented themselves like bosses on her temples. She was a cousin of Sir Marmaduke's, and the elder sister of the old man's one love, so that there was a great link of confidence between them; and she liked coming to Bissett, where the living was always so good, and where she met people who amused her. That pretty girl talking to her is Miss Townshend,—a delicious creature in a country-house, who can ride across country, and play croquet and billiards, and sing little French *chansons*, and dance, and who even has been known on occasions to drive a dogcart and smoke a cigarette. To secure her, entails inviting her father, an intensely respectable, dreary old gentleman—that is he, in the starched check cravat and the high coat-collar; a City magnate, who confines his reading to the City article, and has to be promptly extinguished when he attempts to talk about the "policy of Rooshia." He is endeavouring just now to strike up a conversation with his neighbour Mr. Vincent, the member for Wessex, and Chair-

man of the Dinner-Committee of the House of Commons; but Mr. Vincent is deep in the discussion of a cheese-omelette, and is telegraphing recommendation thereof to Mrs. Vincent, a merry, red-faced looking little woman, who, with her husband, passed her whole life in thinking about good eating. Sir Marmaduke's solicitor, Mr. Russell, a quiet old gentleman, clad in professional black, who was always trying to hide his soft wrinkled hands under his ample coat-cuffs; and Sir Marmaduke's factotum, Major Stone, otherwise Twenty Stone, a big, broad-chested, jovial, bushy-whiskered, moneyless free-lance,—completed the party.

CHAPTER III.

STARTING THE GAME.

"HALLOA!" suddenly shouted Sir Marmaduke from his vantage-ground on the rug.

Every body looked up.

"Halloa!" shouted the old gentleman again, plunging his hands over the wrists in his trousers-pockets, and bringing to the surface a couple of letters. "By Jove! I forgot to tell Mrs. Mason or any of them that more people were coming down! Here, Stone—somebody—just ring that bell, will you? Here are two men coming down to-day—be here by dinner, they say; and I forgot to order rooms and things for them!"

"Who are they, Sir Marmaduke?" asked Lyster languidly.

"What the deuce is that to you, sir?" roared the old gentleman. "Friends of mine, sir!

That's enough, isn't it? Have you finished lunch?"

"I haven't had any," said Lyster. "I never eat it. I hate lunch."

"Great mistake that," said Mr. Vincent, wiping his mouth. "Ought always to eat whenever you can. 'Gad, for such an omelette as that I'd get up in the middle of the night."

"Perhaps, Lyster," said Major Stone, coming back from ringing the bell, "you're of the opinion of the man who said that lunch was an insult to your breakfast and an injury to your dinner?"

"He was a confounded fool, whoever he was," broke in Sir Marmaduke. "I hate those fellows who talk epigrams. Halloa, Gumble, is that you? Tell Mrs. Mason two gentlemen are coming down to stop. She must get rooms ready for them, and that sort of thing."

"Yes, Sir Marmaduke," said Gumble. "In the Barracks, Sir Marmaduke?"

"God bless my soul, sir! how should I know?" said his master testily. "What do I keep a housekeeper for, and a pack of lazy ser-

vants, who do nothing but eat, if I'm to be worried about things like this? Tell Mrs. Mason, sir! Do as you're told!"

And exit Gumble, whose admirable training and long experience only prevented him from bursting into a guffaw.

"Though you refused Captain Lyster, I don't think you'll mind telling me who these gentlemen are, Sir Marmaduke?" said Barbara, leaving the table, and advancing to the rug.

"No, my dear; I'll tell you any thing. Besides, they'll be here to-night. One is Mr. Beresford, and the other a learned professor. There, I've thrown them among you to worry their reputations before they arrive; and now I'll be off to my study. And don't any of you come and bother me; do you hear? If you want any thing, ask Stone for it. Come, Russell."

And, followed by the lawyer, the old gentleman left the room, after patting Barbara's head with one hand, and shaking his clenched fist, in a serio-comic manner, at the rest of the company.

"What very strange people my cousin does

get hold of!" said Miss Lexden, commencing the onslaught directly the door was closed. "Which Mr. Beresford is it, do you suppose?"

The question was general, but Mr. Townshend answered it, by saying pompously,

"Perhaps it's Mr. Beresford, one of the Directors of the Bank of England, who—"

"God forbid!" broke in Lyster suddenly.

"Amen to that sweet prayer," said Barbara, in a low voice. Then louder: "Oh, dear, let's hope it's not an old gentleman from the City."

"No, no; don't fear," said Major Stone, laughing. "You all know him. It's Charley Beresford, from the Tin-Tax Office."

"What! the Commissioner?" exclaimed little Miss Townshend, clapping her hands. "Oh, I *am* so glad! He is *such* fun!"

"Oh, every body knows Mr. Beresford," said Vincent; "capital judge of cooking; on the committee of the Beauclerk."

"I'm afraid I'm nobody, then," said old Miss Lexden; "what age is he?"

"Oh, same age as every body else," drawled

Lyster. "I find every body's the same age,—seven-and-twenty. Nobody ever goes beyond that."

"You know Mr. Beresford, aunt," said Barbara. "He's a favourite horror of yours. You recollect him at Hawley last year?"

"Oh, the odious man who carried on so shamefully with that rich woman,—the grocer's widow!" said the old lady. "Well, wasn't it a grocer?—merchant, then, if you like,—something to do with the City and the West Indies, I know. Oh, a dreadful person!"

"Charley Beresford's not a bad fellow, though," said Lyster. "Who did Sir Marmaduke say the other man was? Professor something."

"Perhaps Major Stone knows him," chimed in Mrs. Townshend.

"Who's the Professor that's coming down, Stone?" asked Lyster.

"*I* don't know. I only know two professors: Jackman the conjuror,—Jacquinto he calls himself,—and Holloway the ointment-man; and it's

neither of them. This is some scientific or literary great gun that Sir Marmaduke was introduced to lately."

"Oh, dear!" said Barbara plaintively, "what a dreadful idea! Probably an old gentleman, with gold spectacles and a bald head, covered all over with the dust of the British Museum, and carrying dead beetles and things in his pockets!"

"A professor!" said Miss Townshend; "we had one at Gimp House—a French one! I'm sure he'll take snuff and have silk pocket-handkerchiefs."

"And choke at his meals," added Barbara. "This is too horrible."

"I trust he won't come from any low neighbourhood," said Mrs. Vincent; "the small-pox is very bad in some districts in London."

"The deuce! I hope he won't bring it down here," drawled Lyster.

"There's not the slightest fear of infection, if you've been vaccinated," said Mr. Townshend.

"Oh, but I haven't," replied Lyster. "I

wouldn't be—at least without chloroform; it hurts one so."

"What nonsense, Captain Lyster!" laughed Barbara. "Why, I was vaccinated, and it didn't hurt me the least."

"Did it hurt as much as sitting for your photograph?" asked the Captain, rising. "Because I'll never sit for my photograph again, except under chloroform."

"Well, small-pox or not, you'll see the old gentleman at dinner," said Stone; "and you mustn't chaff him, mind, Lyster; for he's a favourite of Sir Marmaduke's."

And so the luncheon-party broke up. Old Miss Lexden and Miss Townshend drove out in a pony-phaeton, with the intention of falling in with the shooting-party; Mrs. Vincent retired to her room, to allow the process of digestion to take place during her afternoon nap; Mr. Vincent walked leisurely across the fields to the neighbouring village, and had an interview with a fisherman's wife, who had a new method of dressing mackerel; Mr. Townshend took out a

pamphlet on the Bank Charter, and, having placed it before him, went straight off to sleep; Major Stone mounted his sure-footed cob and rode round the farm, looking after broken fences, and dropping hints as to the expediency of all being ready with the Michaelmas rent; and Barbara and Captain Lyster wandered into the Paddock, with the intention of playing croquet.

But they had played only very few strokes, when Lyster, leaning on his mallet, looked across at his companion, and said gravely,

"I assure you, Miss Lexden, I pity you from the bottom of my soul."

As she stood there, her complexion heightened by the exercise, the little round hat admirably suiting the classic shape of her head, and the neatest little foot tapping the mallet, she didn't look much to be pitied; and she tossed her head rather disdainfully, as she asked,

"Pity me, Captain Lyster! and why?"

"Because you are so horribly bored here! I've been such a terrible sufferer from *ennui* myself, that I know every expression on those who

have it; and you're very far advanced indeed. *I* know what it is that beats you, and I can't help you."

"And what is it, pray?"

"You know what Cleopatra says in the *Dream of Fair Women:* 'I have no men to govern in this wood!' Pardon me; I'm a singular person; not clever, you know, but always saying what I think, and that sort of thing; and you're dying for a flirtation."

"Surely *you* have no cause to complain. I've never tried to make you my 'Hercules, my Roman Antony,' Captain Lyster."

"No; you've been good enough to spare me. You've known me too long, and think of me, rightly enough perhaps, as the 'dull, cold-blooded Cæsar;' and there's no one here that's at all available except Stone, and his birth with Sir Marmaduke is like a college-fellowship—he'd have to resign all income if he married. It's an awful position for you! Oh, by Jove, I forgot the two men coming! I'm afraid Charley Beresford's no go; but you might make great running with the Professor."

"*Que d'honneur!*" said Barbara, laughing at his serious face. "That is a compliment, especially after our notions of what he will be like;" and then, after a minute's reflection, she added, with a proud gesture, "It would be a new field, at all events, and not a bad triumph, to win a steady sage from his books and—"

"Vivien over again, by Jove!" said Lyster, in the nearest approach he had ever made to a shout; "Vivien divested of all impropriety; only look out that Merlin does not get you into the charm. They've no end of talk, these clever fellows. I knew a professor at Addiscombe—deuced ugly bird too—who ran off with an earl's daughter, all through his gab—I beg pardon, his tongue."

"*Gare aux corbeaux!* I flatter myself I can hold my own with the old crows," said Barbara; "however, this is mere nonsense. No more croquet, thank you, Captain Lyster. I must go in and reflect on your words of wisdom."

And dropping him a little curtsey of mock humility, she moved off towards the house.

"I'd lay long odds she follows up the idea,"

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said Lyster to himself, as he sat down on the twisted roots of an old elm and lit a cheroot. "She's a fine creature," he added, looking after her; "something in the Cheetah line,—fine and swervy and supple, and as clever as—as old boots. How awfully old I'm growing! I should have gone mad after such a girl as that once; and now —she doesn't cause me the slightest emotion. There's that little Townshend, now,—ah, that's quite another matter!"

Had Barbara really any notion of following out Lyster's sportive notion, and of playing Vivien to an aged Merlin? of winning from his goddess Study a man whose whole life had been passed at her shrine, and of lighting with as much fire as yet remained to him eyes dimmed with midnight researches? I know not. But I do know that she spent more time that evening over her toilet than she had done during her stay at the Grange, and that she never looked lovelier than in her rich blue dinner-dress, trimmed with black lace, and with a piece of velvet passing through her hair, and coquettishly fastened at one side by a single splen-

did turquoise. Perhaps some thought of her conversation with Lyster flitted across her brain; for she smiled saucily as she stepped down the wide old staircase, and she had hardly composed her countenance by the time she had passed into the drawing-room, where the party was assembled. The room was lighted only by the flickering blaze of a wood-fire (for the evenings were already chilly), and she could only indistinctly make out that the gentleman whom Sir Marmaduke introduced as "Professor Churchill," and who was to take her in to dinner, was tall, had no spectacles, and was apparently not so old as she had anticipated. But when she looked at him in the full light of the dining-room, she nearly uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw, as the embodiment of her intended Merlin, a man of six feet in height, about thirty years of age, with short wavy brown hair, hazel eyes, a crisp dark beard, and a genial, good-humoured, sensible expression. All this she took in in covert glances; and so astonished was she, that after a few commonplaces she could not resist saying,

"And are you really a professor, Mr. Churchill?"

He laughed heartily—a clear, ringing, jolly laugh—as he replied, "Well, I am,—at least I stand so honoured on the books of old Leipzig University, and our good host here always will insist on dubbing me with my full title. But I don't generally sport it. I always think of dancing, or calisthenics, or deportment,—Turveydrop, you know,—in connexion with the professorship. I can't help noticing that you look astonished, Miss Lexden; I trust I haven't rudely put to flight any preconceived notions of yours as to my dignity?"

"No—at least—well, I will frankly own my notions were different."

"There, you see, I had the advantage; with the exception of flatly contradicting the late Mr. Campbell in his assertion about distance lending enchantment, &c., my ideas of you are thoroughly realised. But—I had seen you before."

"You had!" said Barbara, feeling a pleasurable glow pass over her cheek at something in his tone.

"Oh, yes; several times. The first time ten years ago, when I saw you in company with your father—"

"My father! Where?" interrupted Barbara.

"Where? oh, at an hotel,—Burdon's Hotel. You won't remember it, of course." (Barbara never knew why Major Stone, who was sitting near them, grinned broadly when Mr. Churchill said this.) "You were a little child then. And recently I have seen you at the Opera, and ridden past you in the Row."

At this juncture Sir Marmaduke called out to Churchill from the other end of the table, and the conversation became general. Barbara watched Mr. Churchill as he took a leading part in it, his earnest face lit up, and all listening attentively to his remarks. What a clever, sensible face it was! And he went to the Opera, and rode in the Park! What about Vivien and Merlin now?

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMMISSIONER'S VIEWS ARE MATRIMONIAL.

Mr. Charles Beresford, Junior Commissioner of the Tin-Tax Office, who was expected down at Bissett, did not leave London, as he had intended, on the day which witnessed Mr. Churchill's arrival at that hospitable mansion. His portmanteau and gun-case had been taken by his servant to the Club, where he was to call for them on his way to the station; and he had arranged with one of his brother-commissioners to undertake his work of placing his initials in the corner of various documents submitted to him. He had stayed in town longer than his wont; and as he looked out into the dreary quadrangle of Rutland House, in a block of which the Tin-Tax Office was situate, and gazed upon the blazing flags, and the dull *commissionnaires* sitting on their bench outside the principal

entrance and winking in the heat, and upon the open windows opposite,—whereat two clerks were concocting an effervescent drink in a tumbler, and stirring it round with a paper-knife,—he cursed the dulness, and expressed his delight that he was about to rusticate for a lengthened period.

Nobody heard this speech; or if, indeed, the words fell upon the ear of the soft-shod messenger who at that moment entered the room, he was far too dexterous and too old an official to let his face betray it. He glided softly to Mr. Beresford's elbow, as that gentleman still remained at the window, vacantly watching the powder-mixing clerks, and murmured,

"Letter, sir."

"Put it down," said Beresford, without turning round. "Official, eh?"

"No, sir, private. Brought just now, by a groom. No answer, sir."

"Give it here," said Beresford, stretching out his hand. "Ah, no answer! That'll do, Stubbs."

And Stubbs went his way to a glass-case, in which, in the company of four other messengers

and twenty bells, his official days were passed, and gave himself up to bemoaning his stupidity in having taken his fortnight's leave of absence in the past wet July instead of the present sultry season.

Mr. Beresford looked at the address of the letter, and frowned slightly. It was a small note, pink paper, with a couchant dog and an utterly illegible monogram on the seal, and the superscription was written in a long scrawly hand. There was an odour of patchouli, too, about it which roused Beresford's ire, and he muttered as he opened it, "Confounded stuff! Who on earth is she copying now, with her scents and crests and humbug? I thought she'd more sense than that!" And he ran his eye over the note. It was very short.

"Dear Charley,—What has become of you? Why do you never come near The Den? It is nearly three weeks since you were here. I'm off to Scarborough on Tuesday; a lot of my pupils are there and want me, so I can carry on my little game of money-making, get some fresh air, and

perhaps pick up some fresh nags to sell before the hunting season, all 'under vun hat,' as Tom Orme fasechous—facesh (I don't know how to spell it)—says. Come up and dine to-night at seven. There are two or three good fellows coming, and I want to talk to you and to look at your old phiz again, and see how much older you've grown during your absence, and how much *balder;* for, you know, you're growing *bald*, Charley, and that will be awful hard lines to such a *swell* as you. Seven sharp, mind.

"Always yours,

"K. M.

"P.S. Charley, if you don't come, I shall think you've grown *proud;* and it'll be a great shame, and I shall never speak to you again.

"K. M."

Now lest, after a perusal of this letter, any one should think ill of its writer, I take leave to announce at once that Kate Mellon was a virtuous woman; pure in heart, though any thing but simple; without fear, but not without as much reproach as could possibly be heaped upon her by

all of her own sex who envied her good looks, her high spirits, and her success. There are, I take it, plenty of novels in which one can read the doings, either openly described or broadly hinted at, of the daughters of Shame under many a pretty alias; and it is because one of these aliases describes the calling of which Kate Mellon was the most successful follower, that I am so desirous of clearing her good name, and immediately vindicating her position with my readers. Kate Mellon was a horsebreaker, a *bonâ-fide* horsebreaker; one who curbed colts, and "took it out of" kickers and rearers, and taught wild Irish horses and four-year-olds fresh from Yorkshire spinneys to curvet and caper prettily in the Park. She taught riding, too; and half the Amazons in the Row owed their tightness of seat and lightness of hand to her judicious training. She hunted occasionally with the Queen's hounds and with the Pytchley, and no one rode straighter or with more *nonchalance* than she. Give her a lead, that was all she wanted; and when she got it, as she invariably did from the boldest horseman in the

field, she would settle herself in her saddle, left hand well down, right hand jauntily on her hip, and fly over timber, water, no matter what, like a bird. In social life her great pride was that there "was no nonsense" about her; she was not more civil to the great ladies who sent their horses to her establishment to be broke, and who would occasionally come up and inspect the process, than she was to the stable-helpers' wives and children, who all worshipped her for her open-handed generosity. Tommy Orme, who was popularly supposed to be a hundred and fifty years old, but who lived with the youth of the Household Brigade and the Foreign Office and the *coryphées*, and who knew every body remarkable in any one way, never was tired of telling how Kate, teaching the Dowager Lady Wylminster to drive a pair of spirited dun ponies, had, in the grand lady's idea, intrenched upon her prerogative, and was told that she was a presuming person, and desired to remember her place.

"Person, indeed!" said Kate; "person yourself, ma'am! My place isn't by you after that,

and now get the duns home the best way you can;" with which she sprang from the low phaeton, struck off across the fields, and left the wretched representative of aristocracy "with a couple of plunging brutes that soon spilt the old woman into the hedge, broke the trap all to pieces, and rushed away home with the splinter-bar at their heels—give you my word!" as Tommy used to narrate it.

Her manner with men was perfectly frank and open, equally devoid of reticence or coquetry. She called them all by their Christian names if they were commoners, by their titles if they were lords. She answered at once when addressed as "Kitty," or "Old Lady," or "Stunner;" by all of which appellations she was known. She would lay her whip lightly across the shoulders of any particular friend as a token of recognition at the meet; would smoke a cigarette on her way home after the kill; and always carried sherry and sandwiches in a silver combination of flask and box. Her grammar was shaky, and her aspirate occasionally misplaced; she never read any thing but *Bell's Life*

and books on farriery, and she laughed a loud, ringing, resonant shout; but her speech was always free from bad words, and no man ever tried a *double entendre* or a blasphemy twice in her presence. Living the odd strange life she did, defiant of all society's prejudices, it was yet strange that even London slander had left her unassailed. They did say that she was very much taken by Bob Mayo's sabre-scar when he returned from the Crimea, and that Barker, the steeple-chase rider, half gentleman, half jock, was engaged to her; but nothing came of either of these two reports. Early in her London career, very soon after she came to town, and when men were first beginning to inquire who was the dashing horsewoman who rode such splendid cattle with such pluck and skill, De Blague, the Queen's messenger, assumed to know all about her, and at Limmer's one night threw out certain hints by no means uncomplimentary to himself, and eked out with many nods and winks; but two days after that, as De Blague, with two other Foreign-Office men, was leaning over the rails in the Row, Miss

Mellon rode up, and, denouncing him as a "bragging hound," slashed him with her by no means light riding-whip severely over the head and shoulders. After that day no one cared to say much against Kate Mellon.

Who was she, and where did she come from? that no one positively knew. When The Den at Ealing (she so christened it; it was called Myrtle Farm before) was to let, the neighbours thought the landlord would stand out of his rent for many years. The house was a little, long, one-storied building, cut up into small rooms; old, dilapidated, and damp. The stables were rotting with decay; the barns untiled and tumbling down; the twenty or thirty acres of land attached were swampy and unproductive. The place stood untenanted for half a year. Then, one morning, an old gentleman arrived in a four-wheeled cab, went all over the premises, had an interview with the proprietor, announced himself as Mr. Powker, of the firm of Powker and Beak, of Lincoln's Inn, and within a fortnight the lease was assigned to Miss Kate Mellon, spinster. The house was pa-

pered and painted, and put in order; the stables were entirely altered and renovated, and fitted with enamel mangers, and tesselated pavements, and bronze devices for holding the pillar-reins, and all the newest equine upholstery; some of the barns were converted into carriage-houses, and one of the largest into a tan-strewn riding-school; the land was thoroughly drained and laid out in paddocks, where there were tan-rides and all kinds of jumps, and an artificial brook, and every thing for a horse's proper tuition. Miss Mellon did not receive visits from the neighbouring gentry, principally lawyers and merchants, who went regularly to business, and always stared hard at her when their wives were not with them; nor did she attend the parish-church; but she gave largely to all the parochial charities, and in the winter had a private soup-kitchen of her own. I believe that occasionally gin was dispensed in small glasses to the soup-recipients; but all was done under the superintendence of Freeman, the staid stud-groom, who had followed her from Yorkshire, where she said "her people" lived.

But she never said any thing more about them; and you would as soon have got a comic song out of an oyster as a word from Freeman. And she prospered wonderfully. She had to make large additions to the stables, and to build rooms for an increased force of grooms; and even then there were always half a score of horses waiting on her list for admission, either for training or cure. She made money rapidly, and kept it: no better woman of business ever breathed; in a big ledger she scrawled her own accounts, and, as she boasted, could always tell to a farthing "how she stood." With all this she was generous and hospitable; paid her grooms good wages, and gave frequent dinner-parties to her friends,—dinner-parties which scandalised her solemnly pompous neighbours, who would look aghast at the flashing lamps of the carriages dashing up the little carriage-drive to fetch away the company at the small hours, or would listen from beneath their virtuous bedclothes to the shouts of mirth and snatches of melody which came booming over the hushed fields.

One of these dinner-parties—that to which she

had invited Beresford—is just over. The French windows in the long, low dining-room are open; the table is covered with the remains of dessert, and some of the guests have already lighted cigars. Kate Mellon heads her table still; she never leaves the room to the gentlemen,—"It's slow," she says; "women alone fight or bore;" so she remains. You can catch a good glimpse of her now under that shaded swinging moderator-lamp; a little woman, with a closely-knit figure, long violet eyes, and red-gold hair, taken off over her ears, twisted in a thick lump at the back of her head, and secured with a pink coral comb of horse-shoe shape. She is dressed in white spotted muslin, fastened at the throat and waist with coral brooch and clasps. Her nose is a little too thick for beauty; her lips full; her mouth large, with strong white teeth; her hands are white, but large and sinewy; and the tones of her voice are sharp and clear. She is shouting with laughter at a song which a jolly-looking young man, sitting at the little cottage-piano at the end of the room, has just finished; and her laugh makes the old rafters ring again.

"I always yell at that song, Tom," she says. "I havn't heard it since last winter, the day that 'Punch' Croker dined here, and we gave him an olive to taste for the first time."

"He's tremendous fun, is Punch," said the singer. "Why didn't he dine here to-day? Is he out of town?"

"He's got a moor with Penkridge," said Beresford, who was sitting next the hostess. "By Jove, how bored Penkridge will be before he's done with him!"

"Punch has not got much to say for himself," said a tall man, in a dark beard. "I've had him down to dine with me when I've been on guard at the Bank, and, 'pon my soul, he's never said a word the whole night!"

"He was at Baden with us last year," said Beresford; "and when we used to sit and smoke our weeds after dinner in front of the Kursaal, he used to bore us so with staring at us and saying nothing, that we used to pay him to go away. Subscribe five francs, or thalers—according to our means, you know—and send him to play at the tables to get rid of him."

"He's not a bad fellow, though, Punch Croker," said Kate. "And what I like in him is, he never lets out that he don't know every thing!"

"No, that's just it!" said the tall guardsman. "Just after the Derby, I was confoundedly seedy, and my doctor told me I wanted more ozone."

"What's that, Jack?" asked the man at the piano.

"Well, it's some air or stuff that you don't get by sitting up all night, and lying in bed till three. From the doctor's I went to the Rag, and found Meaburn there; and we'd just agreed to dine together, when Punch Croker came in. I told Meaburn to hold on, and we'd get a rise out of Punch. He asked us if we were going to dine, and we said yes, and that he might dine too, if he liked. And I told him I'd got some ozone, and asked him his opinion, as a sort of fellow who knew those things, how it should be cooked. He thought for one moment, and then said, perfectly quietly, 'Well, if you have it before the cheese, it should be broiled.' Never let on that he didn't

know what it was; never changed a muscle of his face,—give you my word!"

They all laughed at this, and then the tall guardsman said, "It's a great bore, though, to get a reputation for stupidity. It's as bad as being supposed to be funny. People are always expecting you to say stupid things, and sometimes it's deuced hard to do."

"Poor old Charleville!" said Beresford; "we all sympathise with you, old fellow, though no one can imagine you ever found any difficulty in being stupid. Comes natural, don't it, old boy?"

Captain Charleville didn't seem to relish this remark, and was about to reply angrily, when Tom Burton, the man who had been singing, struck in hastily with, "Well, it's better to be or to seem stupid, than to be stupid and have the credit of being clever. Now there's Northaw, only said one decent thing in his life; and because that has been told about, fellows say that he's a deuced clever fellow, and that there's more in him than you'd think."

"What was the one good thing he did say?" asked Kate.

"Well, it was one day when he was out with the Queen's last season. Stradwicke was there, and Pattan, and Bellairs, and a lot of men; and Northaw was in a horrid bad temper,—had got up too soon, or something, and was as rusty as Old Boots; so while he was fretting and fuming about, and blackguarding the weather, and his stirrup-leathers, and every thing else, Tom Winch rode up to him. You know Tom Winch, son of great contractor, timber-man, builds bridges, and that sort of thing. 'Morning, my lord!' says Tom Winch. 'Morning,' says Northaw, as sulky as a bear. 'What do you think of my new horse, my lord?' says Tom Winch. 'Ugly brute,' says Northaw, looking up; 'ugly, wooden-legged brute; *looks as if he'd been made at home.*"

Burton rose during the laugh that followed his story, and rang the bell. "I must be off," he said; "I've rung to have the phaeton round, Kitty. Charleville, you'll come with me? I can find room for you, Beresford."

"No; thanks," said Beresford; "I rode down. Oh, tell them to bring my horse round too," he added to the servant.

"Wait five minutes, Charley," said Kate Mellon, in an undertone; "let us have a quiet talk after they're gone. I've got something to say to you."

"Well, good night, Kate; good night, old lady. If you pick up any thing good in Yorkshire, let's know, there's a Stunner! I've promised to mount my sister next season, and she sha'n't ride any thing you don't warrant. Good night, Beresford; good night, old lady;" and with hearty hand-shakes to Kate, and nods to Beresford, Captain Charleville and Tom Burton took themselves off.

"Now, Charley," said Kate, leaning forward on the table while Beresford lit a fresh cigar and threw himself back in his chair,—"now, Charley, tell us all about it."

"About what?" asked Beresford, rolling the leaf of his cigar round with his finger. "That is good, by Jove! You say you want to talk to me,

and you begin by asking me to tell you all about it!"

"I mean about yourself. You're horribly low, and dull, and slow, and wretched. You've scarcely spoken all the evening, and you ate no dinner, and you drank a great deal of wine."

"You're a pretty hostess, Kitty! You've checked off my dinner like the keeper of a *table-d'hôte*."

"Well, you know you might drink the cellar dry, if you liked. But you're all out of sorts, Charley; tell me all about it, I say!"

"You certainly are a strange specimen, Stunner," said Beresford, still calmly occupied with his cigar-leaf; "but there's a wonderful deal of good in you, and I don't mind telling you what I wouldn't say to any one else. I'm done up, Kitty; run the wrong side of the post; distanced, old lady. I've been hit frightfully hard all this year; my book for the Leger looks awful; I owe pots of money, and I am very nearly done."

"My poor Charley!" said the girl, bending forward, with deep interest in her face. "That

certainly is a blue look-out," she continued, —for however earnest was her purpose, she could not but express herself in her slang metaphor. "Is there nothing to fall back upon?"

"Nothing; no resource, save one—and that I'm going to look after at once—marriage!"

"Marriage!"

"Yes; if I could pick up a woman with money, I'd settle down into a regular quiet humdrum life. I'd cut the turf, and ride a bishop's cob, and give good dinners, and go to church, and be regularly respectable, by Jove! I should make a good husband, too; I think I should; only—the worst of it is, that these women with money, by some dispensation of nature, are generally so frightfully hideous."

"Yes," said the girl, who had pushed her hands through her hair, and then clenched them tightly in front of her, and who was looking at him with staring, earnest eyes. "I can't fancy you married, Charley; that's quite a new view of matters; and, as you say, the rich women are not

generally pretty. You can't have every thing, Charley?"

"No," said Beresford, gloomily. "I know that; and it would be deuced hard lines to have to take a Gorgon about with you, and to have to glare at a plain-headed woman sitting opposite you for the rest of your life. But need must—what am I to do?"

"Charley," said the girl, suddenly tilting her chair on to its front legs, and drumming with her right hand upon the table; "look here. You can't have every thing, you know, and it's better to make the running over open ground, no matter how heavy, than to dash at a thick hedge where there may be water and Lord knows what on the other side. Don't hurry it so, Charley; you'll get pounded without knowing it, and then there'll be nothing to pull you through. You can't expect every thing in a wife, you know, Charley. If you got money, you couldn't look for rank, you know, eh?"

"Why, how you do talk about it, old lady!" said Beresford, flicking the ash off his cigar.

"No; I'm not exacting. I wouldn't care about her pedigree, so long as she was well weighted."

"That's right; of course not, Charley! I should think you'd find some one, Charley; not grand, you know, but good and honest, and all that. Not very beautiful either, perhaps, but not ugly, you know; and one who'd love you, Charley, and be true to you, and take care of you, and make you a good wife."

"Yes, I know, and all that sort of thing; but where is she to come from?"

"You might find such a one, Charley, where you never looked for it, perhaps; one who could bring you a little fortune, all honest money, and who could tell you of her past life, which you never dreamed of, and need not be ashamed of. There might be such a one, Charley!"

She had slid from her chair to the ground, and knelt, with her hands on his knees, looking eagerly into his face. Her eyes gleamed with excitement; she had pushed her hair back from her forehead, and her lips were parted in eager anticipation of his words. They came at length, very slowly. At

first he turned pale, and caught his breath for an instant; then gently lifted her hands, and muttered between his teeth, "It's impossible, Kate; it can't be!"

"Impossible!"

"It can't be, I tell you. What would—there, you don't understand these things, and I can't explain. It's impossible! I was a fool to start the subject. Now I must go. Good by, child; write me a line from Scarborough; they'll forward it from the office. Won't you say good by?"

He gripped her cold, passive hand, and two minutes afterwards she heard the sound of his departing horse's feet on the carriage-drive.

For a while Kate Mellon stood motionless, then stamped her foot violently, and sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands, through which the tears welled slowly. Rousing herself at length, she hurried to a writing-table, pulled out a gaudily-decorated *papier-mâché* blotting-book, and commenced scrawling a letter. She wrote hurriedly, passionately, until she had covered the sheet, running her gold pen-holder through the

tangled mass of hair at the back of her head, and twisting a stick of sealing-wax with her teeth the while. The letter finished, she skimmed through it hastily, put it in an envelope, and directed it to "F. Churchill, Esq., *Statesman* Office, E.C."

CHAPTER V.

"THERE'S NOTHING HALF SO SWEET IN LIFE."

FOUR days had slipped away since Churchill's first arrival at Bissett Grange, and he had begun to acknowledge to himself that they had passed more pleasantly than any previous time in his recollection. The mere fact of getting out of business was a great relief to him; he revelled in the knowledge that he had nothing to do; and, in odd times and seasons,—as he lay in bed of nights, for instance,—he would chuckle at the thought that the coming morrow had for him no work and no responsibilities in store; and when he went up to dress himself for dinner, he would settle down into an easy-chair, or hang out of the open window, and delight in the prospect of a good dinner and delightful society, of music and conversation, from which no horrid clock-striking

would tear him away, and send him forth to dreary rooms and brain-racking until the small hours of the morning. Society, music, and conversation! It is true that he enjoyed them all; and yet, when he came to analyse his happiness, he was fain to admit that they all meant Barbara Lexden. As in a glass darkly, that tall majestic figure moved through every thought, and sinuously wound itself round every impulse of his heart. At first he laughed at his own weakness, and tried to exorcise the spirit, to whose spells he found himself succumbing, by rough usage and hard exercise. There is probably nothing more serviceable in getting rid of a sharp attack of what is commonly known as "spooniness"—when it is accidental, be it remembered, not innate—than the eager pursuit of some healthy sport. Men try wine and cards; both of which are instantaneous but fleeting remedies, and which leave them in a state of reaction, when they are doubly vulnerable; but shooting or hunting, properly pursued, are thoroughly engrossing while they last, and when they are over necessitate an immediate recourse to

slumber from the fatigue which they have induced. In the morning, even should opportunity offer, the "spooney" stage is at its lowest ebb; it is rarely possible to work oneself up to the proper pitch of silliness immediately after breakfast, and then some further sporting expedition is started, which takes one out of harm's way. But in Churchill's case even this remedy failed; he was not much of a sportsman; not that he shot badly, but that he was perpetually *distrait*, and when reminded of his delinquencies by a sharp, "Your bird, sir!" from one of his companions, would fire so quickly, and with so much effect, as to mollify the speaker, and lead him to believe that it was shortsightedness, and not being a "Cockney"—that worst of imputations amongst sportsmen—that led the stranger to miss marking the rise of the covey. And yet Churchill displayed no lack of keen vision in making out the exact whereabouts of a striped petticoat and a pair of high-heeled Balmoral boots which crossed a stile a little in advance of the servants bringing the luncheon; but these once seen, and their wearer once talked to, sport was over

with him for the day, and he strolled back with Miss Lexden, at a convenient distance behind Miss Townshend and Captain Lyster, who led the way.

"You are soon tired of your sport, Mr. Churchill," said Barbara; "I should have thought that you would have followed ardently any pursuit on which you entered."

"You do me a great deal too much honour, Miss Lexden," replied Churchill, laughing; "my pursuits are of a very desultory nature, and in all of them I observe Talleyrand's caution,—*Point de zèle.*"

"And you carry that out in every thing?"

"In most things. Mine is a very easy-going, uneventful, unexcitable life; I live thoroughly quietly; *da capo*—all over again; and it is seldom that any thing breaks in upon the routine of my humdrum existence."

"Then," said Barbara, looking saucily up at him from under her hat—"then you do not follow the advice which your favourite Talleyrand gave to the ambassadors whom he

was despatching, *tenez bonne table, et soignez les femmes.*"

Churchill looked up, and for an instant caught her glance; then he laughed lightly, and said,

"Well, not exactly; though the dinners at the club, even the modest joint and the table-beer, are not by any means to be despised; and as for the rest of it, not being a diplomatist, Miss Lexden, I have no occasion to play the agreeable to any one save in my own house, and, being a bachelor, the only woman I have to see to as properly *soignée* is my old mother, and I *do* like her to have the best of every thing."

"Your mother lives with you?"

"Yes, and will, so far as I can see, until the end of the chapter."

"She—you must be very fond of her!" said Barbara, as by a sudden impulse, looking up at his kindling eyes and earnest face.

"I am very proud of her," he replied; "she is more like my sister than my mother; enters into all my hopes and fears, shares all my aspirations, and consoles me in all my doubts."

"More like your wife, then," said Barbara, with a slight sneer. "You have in her a rare combination of virtues."

"No," said Churchill; "not rare, I am disposed to think. I don't suppose that, in your class,—where maternity means nothing in particular to sons, and merely chaperonage, or the part of buffer, to ward off paternal anger for bills incurred, to daughters,—such characters flourish; but in mine they are common enough."—("A little touch of old Harding's Radicalism in that speech, by Jove!" thought he to himself.)

"I don't exactly follow your reference to my class as distinct from your own. I suppose we mix amongst pretty much the same people, though as individuals we have not met before. But," added Barbara, with a smile, "now that that great occurrence has taken place, I don't think we need enter into lengthy disquisitions as to the charms and duties of maternity; indeed, we will not, for I shall ask you to observe the only conditions which I require from my friends."

"And they are —?" asked Churchill.

"*Qu'on exécute mes ordres*, as Louis Napoleon said when asked what should be done on the Second of December. So long as my commands are obeyed, I am amiability itself."

"And suppose they were disobeyed?" asked Churchill again.

"Then—but I won't tell you what would happen! I don't think you'll ever have the chance of knowing; do you think you shall? Not that I like amiable people generally—do you? Your blue-eyed girls, with colourless hair like blotting-paper, and—but I forgot I was talking to an author. I suppose you're making fun of all I say?"

"On the contrary," said Churchill, struggling to keep his gravity, and producing a small memorandum-book, "I purpose making a note of that description for use on a future occasion. There is a spiteful simplicity in that phrase about 'blotting-paper hair' which is really worth embalming in a leader."

"Now I know you're laughing, and I hate to be laughed at—."

"By no means; I subscribe the roll. I am now one of the *âmes damnées*, sworn to obey the spell of the sorceress; and the spell is—?"

"Nothing. Never mind. You will know easily enough when it is once uttered. Now they're coming back to us, and I've lost my glove. Have you seen it? How very absurd!"

As she spoke, they came up with Lyster and Miss Townshend, who were waiting for them at a gate leading into the Grange lands.

"How slowly you walk, Miss Lexden!" said Lyster; "Miss Townshend thought you never would come up with us."

Miss Townshend, with much curl-tossing and laughter, declared she had never said any thing of the kind.

"Quite otherwise," replied Barbara; "from the earnest manner in which you were carrying on the conversation, there could be no doubt that it was you who were going a-head."

"I?—I give you my word I was merely talking of scenery, and telling Miss Townshend how much I should like to show her Rome."

"And promising, when there, to enter into the spirit of the proverb, and do as the Romans—eh, Captain Lyster?"

"Oh, ah,—yes! I see what you mean. That's not so bad, eh, Mr. Churchill? You might use that in some of your thingummies, eh? Though I don't know that there's much difference between Rome and any other place, after all. It's rather like London, I think."

"Is it?" said Churchill. "I confess my short sojourn there gave me a very different idea."

"Well, I don't know; it's mouldier and more tumble-down, certainly, but there are some parts of it that are uncommonly like the unfinished streets in the new part of Belgravia. And people walk about, and eat and drink, and flirt, you know, just as they do in town. There's a Colosseum at Rome, too, as well as in London, only the one in Rome isn't in such good repair."

This was said in perfect good faith; and the others shouted with laughter at it, in the midst of which they came to a stile, joining upon the Paddock, and here they parted into couples again,

only this time Churchill and Barbara took the lead.

"I think she's made another *coup*," said Lyster, looking at them, as they immediately fell into earnest conversation. "She certainly is wonderful,—never misses fire!"

"If I were Barbara, I should be careful about any flirtation with Mr. Churchill. They're dreadful people, these poets, you know,—at least so I've always heard; and if you give them any encouragement, and then won't marry them, they cry out, and abuse you terribly in books and newspapers."

"That would be awful!" said Lyster; "as bad as having your letters read out in a breach-of-promise case, by Jove! Never could understand how fellows wrote such spoony letters to women,—never could fancy how they thought of all the things they said."

And yet I think, if Captain Lyster had been rigorously cross-examined, he must needs have confessed that he himself had never, throughout the whole course of his previous life, gone through

so much actual thinking as since he knew Miss Townshend. There was, perhaps, no species of flirtation in which he was not an adept, for he had sufficient brains to do what he called the "talkee-talkee;" while his natural idleness enabled him to carry on a silent *solitude à deux*, and to make great play with an occasional elevation of the eyebrow or touch of the hand. He had run through a thorough course of garrison hacks, and had seen all the best produce of the export Indian market; he had met the beauties of the season at London balls and in country houses, and his listlessness and languor had hitherto carried him through scot-free. But now he was certainly "fetched," as his friends would call it, and began to feel an interest in Miss Townshend which he had never felt for any other person. There had been a two days' flirtation between him and Barbara Lexden; but they were so utterly unsuited, that, at the end of that time, they, as it were, showed their hands to each other, and then, with a laugh, threw up their cards. The flirtation was never renewed; but a curious, strange friendship,—exhibited in

the conversation about the coming professor,—and always half raillery on both sides, existed between them. But "this little Townshend girl," as he thought of her in his dreamy reveries, was quite another matter; she was so jolly and good-tempered, and so approachable, and never gave herself any airs, and never wanted talking to or that sort of thing, but could amuse herself always, as chirpy as a bird, by Jove! And these attributes had an immense amount of weight with taciturn Fred Lyster, who, moreover, had recently discovered a bald spot about the size of a sixpence at the top of his back-parting, and who immediately perceived imminent age, determined on marriage, and even thought of making his will. And little Miss Townshend walks by his side, and prattles away, and laughs, saucily tossing her curls in the air, and is as merry as possible; save when, stealing an occasional glance from under her hat, she detects her companion's eyes very earnestly fixed upon her, and then a serious expression will settle on her face for an instant, and something like a sigh escape her.

We are a strange race! Here are two couples engaged in the same pursuit, and yet how different is the process! While Lyster is strolling idly by Miss Townshend's side, and listening to her little nonsense, Churchill and Barbara are stepping ahead, thoroughly engrossed in their conversation. He is talking now, telling her of a German adventure of his; how, with some other students, he made the descent of the Rhine on one of the timber-rafts; how they came to grief just below the Lörely, and were all nearly drowned. He tells this with great animation and with many gestures, acting out his story, as is his wont; and throughout all he has a sensation of pleasure as he catches glimpses of her upturned earnest face, lighting up at the special bits of the narrative, always eager and attentive. His earnestness seems infectious. She has dropped all her society drawl, all her society tricks and byplay, and shows more of the real woman than she has for many a day. They talk of Germany and its literature, of Goethe and Schiller and Heine; and he tells her some of those stories of Hoffmann which are such

special favourites with *Bürschen.* Thus they pass on to our home poets; and here Barbara is the talker, Churchill listening and occasionally commenting. Barbara has read much, and talks well. It is an utter mistake to suppose that women nowadays have what we have been accustomed, as a term of reproach, to call "missish" taste in books or art. Five minutes' survey of that room which Barbara called her own in her aunt's house in Gloucester Place would have served to dispel any such idea. On the walls were proofs of Leonardo's "Last Supper" and Landseer's "Shoeing the Horse;" a print of Delaroche's "Execution of Lady Jane Grey;" a large framed photograph of Gerome's "Death of Cæsar;" an old-fashioned pencil-sketch of Barbara's father, taken in the old days by D'Orsay long before he ever thought of turning that pencil to actual use; and a coloured photograph—a recent acquisition—of a girl sitting over a wood-fire in a dreamy attitude, burning her love-letters, called "L' Auto da Fé." On the bookshelves you would have found Milton, Thomas à-Kempis, *David Copperfield, The Christmas Carol,*

a much-used Tennyson, Keats, George Herbert's Poems, Quarles' *Emblems*, *The Christian Year*, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Dante, Schiller, *Faust*, Tupper (of course! "and it is merely envy that makes you laugh at him," she always said), *The Newcomes*, and a quarto Shakespeare. No French novels, I am glad to say; but a fat little Béranger, and a yellow-covered Alfred de Musset are on the mantel-piece, while a brass-cross-bearing red-edged Prayer-Book lies on the table by the bed. Barbara's books were not show-books; they all bore more or less the signs of use; but she had read them in a desultory manner, and had never thoroughly appreciated the pleasure to be derived from them. She had never lived in a reading set; for when old Miss Lexden had mastered the police intelligence and the fashionable news from the *Post*, her intellectual exercises were at an end for the day; and her friends were very much of the same calibre. So now for the first time Barbara heard literature talked of by one who had hitherto made it his worship, and who spoke of it with mingled love and reverence—spoke without lec-

turing, leading his companion into her fair share of the talk, mingling apt quotation with caustic comment or enthusiastic eulogy, until they found themselves, to Barbara's surprise, at the hall-door.

I am glad that it is my province as historian to discourse to my readers of the thoughts, impulses, and motives influencing the characters in this story, else it would be difficult for me to convey so much of their inner life as I wish to be known, and which yet would not crop out in the course of the action. In writing a full-flavoured romance of the sensational order, it is not, perhaps, very difficult to imbue your readers with a proper notion of your characters' character. The gentleman who hires two masked assassins to waylay his brother at the foot of the bridge has evidently no undue veneration for the Sixth Commandment; while the marchioness who, after having only once seen the young artist in black velvet, gives him the gold key leading to her secret apartments, and makes an assignation with him at midnight, is palpably not the style of person whom you would prefer as governess for your daughters.

But in a commonplace story of every-day life, touching upon such ordinary topics as walks and dinners and butchers' meat, marrying and giving in marriage, running into debt, and riding horses in Rotten Row,—where (at least, so far as my experience serves) you find no such marked outlines of character, you must bring to your aid all that quality of work which in the sister art is known by the title pre-Raphaelitic, and show virtue in the cut of a coat and vice in the adjustment of a cravat. Moreover, we pen-and-ink workers have, in such cases, an advantage over our brethren of the pencil, inasmuch as we can take our readers by the button-hole, and lead them out of the main current of the story, showing them our heroes and heroines in *déshabille*, and, through the medium of that window which Vulcan wished had been fixed in the human breast—and which really is there, for the novelist's inspection—making them acquainted with the inmost thoughts and feelings of the puppets moving before them.

When Barbara went to her room that night and surrendered herself to Parker and the hair-

brushes, that pattern of ladies'-maids thought that she had never seen her mistress so preoccupied since Karl von Knitzler, an *attaché* of the Austrian Embassy,—who ran for a whole season in the ruck of the Lexden's admirers, and at last thought he had strength for the first flight,—had received his *coup de grâce.* In her wonderment Parker gave two or three hardish tugs at the hair which she was manipulating, but received no reproof; for the inside of that little head was so busy as to render it almost insensible to the outside friction. Barbara was thinking of Mr. Churchill—as yet she had not even thought of him by his Christian name, scarcely perhaps knew it—and of the strange interest which he seemed to have aroused in her. The tones of his voice yet seemed ringing in her ears; she remembered his warm, earnest manner when speaking from himself, and the light way in which he fell into her tone of jesting badinage. Then, with something like a jar, she recollected his suppressed sneer at the difference in their "class," and her foot tapped angrily on the floor as the recollection rose in her mind. Mingled

strangely with these were reminiscences of his comely head, white, shapely hands, strong figure, and well-made boots; of the way in which he sat and walked; of—and then, with a start which nearly hurled one of the brushes out of Parker's hand, she gathered herself together as she felt the whole truth rush upon her, and knew that she was thinking too much of the man, and determined that she would so think no more. Who was he, living away in some obscure region in London, among a set of people whom no one knew, leading a life which would not be tolerated by any of *her* friends, to engross her thoughts? Between them rolled a gulf, wide and impassable, on the brink of which they might indeed stand for a few minutes interchanging casual nothings in the course of life's journey, but which rendered closer contact impossible. And yet—but Barbara determined there should be no "and yet;" and with this determination full upon her, she dismissed Parker and fell asleep.

And Churchill—what of him? Alas, regardless of his doom, that little victim played! When

old Marmaduke gave the signal for retiring, Churchill would not, on this night, follow the other men into the smoking-room. The politics, the ribaldry, the scandal, the horsey-doggy talk, would be all more intolerable than ever; he wanted to be alone, to go through that process, so familiar to him on all difficult occasions, of "thinking it out;" so he told Gumble to take a bottle of claret to his room, and, arrived there, he lit his old meerschaum, and leant out of the window gazing over the distant moon-lit park. But this time the "thinking it out" failed dismally: amid the white smoke-wreaths curling before him rose a tall, slight graceful figure; in his ear yet lingered the sound of a clear low voice; his hand yet retained the thrill which ran through him as she touched it in wishing him "good night." He thought of *her* as he had never thought of woman before, and he gloried in the thought: he was no love-sick boy, to waste in fond despair, and sicken in his longing; he was a strong, healthy man, with a faultless digestion, an earnest will, a clear conscience, and a heart thinking no guile. There was the differ-

ence in the rank, certainly—and in connexion with this reflection a grim smile crossed his face as he remembered Harding, and his caution about "swells"—but what of that? Did not good education, and a life that would bear scrutiny, lift a man to any rank? and would not she—and then he drew from his pocket a dainty, pearl-gray glove (Jouvin's two-buttoned, letter B), and pressed it to his lips. It *was* silly, ladies and gentlemen, I admit; but then, you know, it never happened to any of *us;* and though "the court, the camp, the grove" suffer, we have the pleasure of thinking that the senate, the bar, the commerce of England, and the public press, always escape scot-free.

Breakfast at Bissett Grange lasted from nine—at the striking of which hour old Sir Marmaduke entered the room, and immediately rang the bell for a huge smoking bowl of oatmeal porridge, his invariable matutinal meal—until twelve; by which time the laziest of the guests had generally progressed from Yorkshire-pie, through bacon,

eggs, and Finnan haddies, down to toast and marmalade, and were sufficiently refected. Barbara was always one of the last; she was specially late on the morning after the talk just described; and on her arrival in the breakfast-room found only Mr. and Mrs. Vincent, who always lingered fondly over their meals, and who, so long as the cloth remained on the table, sat pecking and nibbling, like a couple of old sparrows, at the dishes within reach of them; Captain Lyster, who between his sips of coffee was dipping into *Bell's Life;* and Sir Marmaduke himself, who had returned from a brisk walk round the grounds and the stables and the farm, and was deep in the columns of the *Times.* But, to her astonishment, the place at table next hers had evidently not yet been occupied. The solid white breakfast-set was unused, the knives and forks were unsoiled; and yet Mr. Churchill, who had hitherto occupied that place, had usually finished his meal and departed before Barbara arrived. This morning, however, was clearly an exception; he

had not yet breakfasted, for by his plate lay three unopened letters addressed to him. Barbara noticed this — noticed moreover that the top letter, in a long shiny pink envelope, was addressed in a scrawly, unmistakably female hand, and had been redirected in a larger, bolder writing. As she seated herself, with her eyes, it must be confessed, on this dainty missive, the door opened, and Churchill entered. After a general salutation, he was beginning a half-laughing apology for his lateness as he sat down, when his eye lit on the pink envelope. He changed colour slightly; then, before commencing his breakfast, took up his letters and placed them in the breast-pocket of his shooting-coat.

"This is horrible, Miss Lexden," he said, "bringing these dreadful hours into the country; here — where you should enjoy the breezy call of incense-breathing morn, the cock's shrill clarion, and all the rest of it—to come down to your breakfast just when the bucolic mind is pondering on the immediate advent of its dinner."

"Be good enough to include yourself in this sweeping censure, Mr. Churchill," said Barbara. "I was down before you; but I accepted my position, nor, however late I might have been, should I have attempted—"

"I congratulate you, sir," interrupted Mr. Vincent, dallying with a lump of marmalade on a wedge of toast,—"I congratulate you, Mr. Churchill, on a prudence which but few men of your age possess."

"You are very good, but I scarcely follow you."

"I saw you—I saw you put away your letters until after breakfast. A great stroke that! Men generally are so eager to get at their letters, that they plunge into them at once, before meals, little thinking that the contents may have horrible influence on their digestion."

"I am sorry to say that I was influenced by no such sanitary precautions. My correspondence will keep; and I have yet to learn that to read letters in the presence of ladies is—"

"Pray, make no apologies, as far as I am

concerned," said Barbara, with a curl of her lip and an expansion of nostril; "if you have any wish to read your doubtless important correspondence—"

"I have no such wish, Miss Lexden. *Litera scripta manet;* which, being interpreted, means, my letters will keep. And now, Mr. Vincent, I'll trouble you for a skilful help of that game-pie."

Churchill remained firm; he was still at breakfast, and his letters remained unopened in his pocket, when Barbara left the room to prepare for a drive with Miss Townshend. As they re-entered the avenue after a two hours' turn round the Downs, they met Captain Lyster in a dog-cart.

"I have been over to Brighton," he explained; "drove Churchill to the station. He got some news this morning, and is obliged to run up to town for a day or two. But he's coming back, Miss Lexden."

"Is he, indeed!" said Barbara. "What splendid intelligence! I should think, Captain Lyster, that, since the announcement of the fall

of Sebastopol, England has scarcely heard such glorious news as that Mr. Churchill is coming back to Bissett." And, with a clear, ringing laugh, she pulled the ponies short up at the hall-door, jumped from the carriage, and passed to her room.

"She don't like his going, all the same,—give you my word," said Lyster, simply, to Miss Townshend.

And she did not. She coupled his sudden departure with the receipt of that pink envelope and the address in the feminine scrawl. Who was the writer of that letter? What could the business be to take him away so hastily? With her head leaning on her hand, she sits before her dressing-table pondering these things. It certainly *was* a woman's writing. Is this quiet, sedate, self-possessed man a flirt? Does he carry on a correspondence with— And if he does, what is it to her? She is nothing to him—and yet—who *can* it be? It was a woman's hand! She wonders where he is at that moment; she would like to see him just for an instant.

If she could have had her wish, she would have seen him by himself in a railway-carriage, an unheeded *Times* lying across his knee, and in his hand a little pearl-gray kid-glove.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMISSIONER'S SHELL EXPLODES.

When the party assembled for dinner on the day of Mr. Churchill's hurried departure from the Grange, they found they had an addition in the person of Mr. Commissioner Beresford, who arrived late in the afternoon, and did not make his appearance until dinner-time. A man of middle height and dapper figure, always faultlessly dressed; slightly bald, but with his light-coloured hair well arranged over his large forehead; with deep-sunk, small, stony-gray eyes, a nose with the nostrils scarcely sufficiently covered, and a large mouth, with long white teeth. He had small white—dead-white—hands, with filbert nails, and very small feet. There was in the normal and ordinary expression of his face something sour and mordant, which, so far as his

eyes were concerned, occasionally faded out in conversation, giving place to a quaint, comic look; but the mouth never changed; it was always fox-like, cruel, and bad. There was no better-known man in London; high and low, rich and poor, gentle and simple, all had heard of Charley Beresford. Citizen of the world, where was he out of place? When there was a tight wedge on the staircase of Protocol House on the Saturday nights when Lady Helmstone received; when at a foot-pace the fashionable world endured hours of martyrdom in procession to the shrine which, once reached, was passed in an instant, according as sole trophy the reminiscence of a bow,—Mr. Beresford was to be seen leaning over the stoutest of dowagers, and looking fresh and undrooping even when pressed upon by the pursiest of diplomatists. When the noble souls of the Body Guards were dismayed within the huge carcasses which contained them because it was whispered that the 180th Hussars intended to wear white hats on their drag to the Derby, and to deck their persons and their horses with blue

rosettes—both which insignia had hitherto been distinctive of the Body Guards—it was Charley Beresford who was applied to on the emergency; and who, on the Derby morning, turned the tables completely by bringing the Body Guards from Limmer's straw-thatched and amber-rosetted to a man. The 180th and their blue were nowhere; and "Go it, yaller!" and "Brayvo, Dunstable!" were the cries all down the road. When Mr. Peter Plethoric, the humorous comedian of the Nonpareil Theatre, wanted some special patronage for his benefit, "Charley, dear boy!" was his connecting-link with that aristocracy whose suffrages he sought. He went into every phase of society: he had an aunt the widow of a cabinet minister, who lived in Eaton Square; and an uncle a bishop, who lived in Seamore Place; and he dined with them regularly two or three times in the season, lighting his cigar within a few yards of the house, and quietly strolling down to the Argyll Rooms, or to the green-room of the theatre, or to the parlour of a sporting-public to get the latest odds on a forthcoming fight. He

turned up his coat-collar of late when he visited these last-named places, and the pugilistic landlords had orders never to pronounce his name, but to call him "Guv'nor;" it would not do for an official high in her Majesty's service to be recognised in such quarters. Before his aristocratic friends obtained for him his commissionership, his name was one of the most common current amongst the Fancy; but since then he had eschewed actual presence at the ring, as he had blue bird's-eye handkerchiefs, cigars in the daylight, and nodding acquaintance with broughams in the park. "*Il faut se ranger*," he used to say; "it would never do for those young fellows down at the Office to think that I was or ever had been a fast lot; and those confounded Radical papers, they made row enough about the appointment, and they'll always be on the look-out to catch me tripping." He little knew that his fame had preceded him to the Tin-Tax Office; that all the old clerks were prepared to receive him with something between fear and disgust, all the young ones with unmingled admiration; that daily bul-

letins of his dress and manners were circulated amongst the juniors, and that those who could afford it dressed at him to a man.

He was four-and-thirty when he got his appointment, and he had held it about two years. There was even betting that the promotion would "go in the office;" that Mr. Simnel, the secretary, a very clever man, would get it; that the vacancy would not be filled up; and various other rumours. But the Chancellor of the Exchequer felt that Mr. Simnel had been going a little too much ahead lately, acting on his own responsibility; and as the widow of the cabinet minister (who owned a borough in Devonshire) and the bishop concurrently attacked the Premier, that nobleman gave way, and Charles Beresford exchanged the dreariness of Bruges, in which dull Belgian city of refuge he had been for some months located, for a seat in the board-room at Rutland House. His uncle and aunt, through their respective solicitors, bought up his outstanding debts, and settled them at a comparatively low rate (his Oxford ticks had been settled years ago

out of his mother's income); and he came into a thousand a year, paid quarterly, free and unencumbered. A thousand a year, in four cheques on the Bank of England in January, April, July, and October, ought to be a sufficiency for an unmarried man; but with Charles Beresford, as with a good many of us, the mere fact of the possession of money gave rise to a wild desire for rushing into unlimited expense. To belong to three clubs —the Beauclerk in Pall Mall, aristocratic and exclusive; the Minerva (proposed thereat by the bishop), literary and solemn; the Haresfoot, late and theatrical;—to have capital rooms in South Audley Street; to keep a mail-phaeton and pair, with a saddle-horse and a hunter during the season; to give and join in Greenwich and Richmond dinners; to be generous in the matter of kid-gloves and jewelry; to have a taste (and to gratify it) in choice wines; to make a yearly excursion to Baden, and when there to worship extensively at the shrine of M. Benazet; to be a connoisseur in art, and a buyer of proofs before letters, and statuary, and tapestry, and antiques;

to be miserable without the possession of an Opera-stall; all these vagaries, though pleasant, are undeniably expensive; and at the end of his second year of office Charles Beresford found that he had spent every farthing of his income, and owed, in addition, between three and four thousand pounds.

He could not compound with his creditors; he dared not go through the Court, for "those rascally papers" would then have been down on him at once, and his official appointment might have been sacrificed. The Government just then had two or three black sheep, about whom people had talked, among their subordinates; and Beresford might have been the Jonah, sacrificed to allay the storm of virtuous public indignation. Besides, though his great soul might have been won over to include in his schedule Messrs. Sams and Mitchell, Mr. Stecknadel, the tailor of Conduit Street, and Hocks, with whom his horses stood at livery, he could not inscribe the names of the Irrevocable Insurance Company, to whom for the money borrowed he had given the names of two substantial

friends as sureties; or of Mr. Parkinson, solicitor, of Thavies Inn, who "did his paper," but required another signature on the back. So Mr. Charles Beresford was forced to confess himself "done up," "cornered," and "tree'd;" and only saw one way out of his difficulties—a good marriage. There was no reason why his final chance should not succeed, for he was a very pleasant, agreeable fellow when he chose; had a capital tenor voice, and sang French and German songs with sparkling effect and irreproachable accent; acted well in charade; talked all sorts of styles,—could be earnest, profound, sentimental, flippant, literary, or ribald, as occasion presented; waltzed with a gliding, long, swinging step, which was the envy of all the men who saw him; was sufficiently good-looking, and had something like a position to offer.

Behold him, then, seated at Sir Marmaduke's table next to Miss Townshend, and with Barbara Lexden immediately opposite to him. He has been rattling on pleasantly enough during dinner, but has never forgotten the object of his life; he

is aware that Barbara for him is not an available *parti*, with position certainly, but without money, and with extravagant notions; but he has some recollection of having heard that Mr. Townshend was something approaching to a *millionnaire*, and he determined to satisfy himself upon the point without delay.

"Not at all," he says, referring to something that has gone before; "not at all. It's all very well for you, Sir Marmaduke, whose lines have been cast in pleasant places, to talk so; but for us poor fellows who have to work for our living, this rest is something delightful."

"Work for your living!" growls out the old gentleman. "A pack of lazy placemen. Egad! the fellow talks as though stone-breaking were his occupation, and he'd just straightened his back for five minutes. Work for your living! Do you call sticking your initial to the corner of a lot of figures that you've never read, work? Do you call scrawling your signature at the bottom of some nonsensical document, to prove that you're the 'obedient, humble servant' of some idiot whom

you've never seen, work? Do you call reading the—"

"Now stop, Sir Marmaduke," said Beresford, laughing; "I bar you there. You mustn't repeat that *rococo* old rubbish about reading the newspaper and poking the fire as the sole work in a Government office. That *is* slander."

"I am bound to say," said Mr. Townshend pompously, "that when, in my capacity either as one of the directors of the East-India Company, or Prime Warden of the Bottle Blowers' Company, I have ever had occasion to transact business with any of the Government establishments, I have always found myself well treated."

"I am delighted to hear such testimony from *you*, sir," said Beresford, with some apparent deference, and inwardly thinking that the two positions named looked healthy as regards money.

"God bless my soul!" bawled Sir Marmaduke. Here's a man drives up in a big carriage, with a powdered-headed jackass to let down the steps, and then he 'testifies' that he gets a messenger to take

in his name and that he isn't insulted by the clerks. I wish with all my heart, Townshend, that you were a poor man with a patent to bring out, or a grievance to complain of, or an inquiry to make, and you'd devilish soon see the reception you'd get."

"I hear," said Mr. Vincent, with a mind to turn the conversation, "that a new system of refreshment-supply has recently been introduced into some of our public departments. I have a nephew in the Draft-and-Docket Office, whom I called upon about one o'clock the other day, and I found him engaged upon some very excellent *cotelettes à la Soubise*, which he told me were prepared in the establishment. That appears to me a most admirable arrangement."

"Very admirable," growled Sir Marmaduke, "for the public, who are paying the young ruffians for eating their Frenchified rubbish. By heavens! a clerk at ninety pounds a year, and a made-dish for lunch!"

"Quite right, Mr. Townshend," said Stone; "they feed stunningly now, and don't drink badly

either. By the way, Beresford, I'm agent for Goupil's house at Bordeaux, and I could put in a capital cheap claret into your place, just the thing for your fellows in the hot weather. The tenders are out now, and a word from you would serve me."

"But surely," said Barbara, laughing, "if, as Sir Marmaduke says, you don't work now, Mr. Beresford, you'll be less inclined than ever after M. Goupil's claret."

"Sir Marmaduke is an infidel, Miss Lexden," said Charley. "Send in your tender, Stone, and Goupil's Medoc shall be a fresh incentive to the virtuous Civil Servants!"

"Let him rave, my dear!" said Sir Marmaduke; "let him rave, as your idol Mr. Tennyson says. What he calls work, I call make-believe humbug. What I call work, is what my godson —what's his name—Churchill (what the deuce has he gone away for?) does, night after night, grinding his headpiece—that sort of thing."

"What Churchill is that, sir?" asked Charley.

"Mr. Churchill is a literary man, I believe,"

said Miss Townshend; "wonderfully clever—writes, you know, and all that."

"Oh, Frank Churchill! I know him," replied Beresford. "Has he been down here?"

"Yes; he only left this morning."

"He seems a very good sort of fellow," said Lyster generously, for he didn't quite like the tone of Beresford's voice, and did not at all like the manner in which the Commissioner was paying quiet attention to Miss Townshend. "He's made himself a general favourite in a very short time."

"Yes, that he has," said Miss Townshend; "he's very clever, and not at all conceited, and —oh! he's so nice."

Barbara said nothing.

"I had a few words with him about the money-article yesterday," said Mr. Townshend; "but I must say his views were scarcely so defined as I could have wished."

Beresford had listened attentively to these remarks. He thought he perceived a certain *tendresse* in Miss Townshend's manner of speaking

of Churchill, which did not at all accord with his present views. So he said,

"No, Mr. Townshend; that's not Churchill's peculiar line. He's a poor man, though, as you say, Miss Townshend, a clever one. And he has some object in working hard, for he's going to be married."

"To be married?" exclaimed Miss Townshend, looking across at Barbara.

"To be married?" exclaimed Barbara, flushing scarlet. The next instant she turned deadly cold, and could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken.

"Well, well!" said old Miss Lexden, who up to this time had been engaged in a confidential culinary chat with Mrs. Vincent; "that's always the way. Poor thing! I pity the young woman. These sort of persons always stay out all night, and ill-treat their wives, and all that kind of thing."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Vincent; "leg-of-mutton *ménage* and batter-pudding, perhaps; no soup or fish. Dear, dear! what unwholesome things these love-marriages are!"

"But nobody said that it is a love match," said Miss Townshend. "Perhaps the lady is an heiress, whom Mr. Churchill has captivated by his talent."

"Yes," growled Sir Marmaduke, with a sardonic grin; "an heiress who has been struck with his articles on the Reformatory question, or has become completely dazzled by the lucidity of his views on the Maynooth Grant. A leader-writer in a daily newspaper is just the romantic youth that heiresses fall in love with."

"Now do be quiet, Sir Marmaduke, with your horrid sarcasm, and let us hear what the lady is like. Do tell us, Mr. Beresford," said Miss Townshend.

"Oh, I have no idea of her personal appearance," replied Beresford. "Every body says she's very nice, and that the marriage is coming off at once—that's all I know."

"Your curiosity will soon be gratified, with a very little trouble," interrupted Lyster. "You can ask Mr. Churchill himself—he's coming back to-morrow."

"Coming back?" exclaimed Beresford.

"Yes, to-morrow," replied Lyster, and added, between his teeth, "your little plot will soon be spoilt, my boy."

Shortly afterwards, when the ladies left the table, Barbara did not accompany the rest, but went straight to her own room. There she seated herself at the open window, which looked out upon the lawn and upon the high downs beyond, over which the yellow-faced moon was rising in solemn beauty. And Barbara nestled into the great easy-chair, which she had pulled forward, and rested her chin on her hand, and looked upon the grand picture of varied light and shade with eyes that saw nothing of the beauty, and with a heart that comprehended it not. Down in the hollow lay a little farm, gray and cold and stony, as are such buildings in Sussex, and containing at that time a sleeping, snoring family; for the farmer, a thrifty man, had to be up betimes, and candlelight might as well be spared, and hard-working folk must rest. He did not think much about the moon,

this Sussex farmer, nor did his hinds, two of whom were then snoring in the red-tiled barn just on the shoulder of yon hill; but the glorious lamp of night was as much in their thoughts as she was in those of Barbara Lexden, who had copied out "The moon is up, by Heaven! a lovely eve," from *Childe Harold*, and knew Alfred de Musset's wild lines on the same subject by heart, and had gone in for the romantic business about it, and done some very effective bits of flirtation, in which the goddess Luna was made good use of. But the moon was nothing now to Barbara, whose mind was full of a far more worldly object, and whose foot was tapping impatiently on the floor. Going to be married? Then it was all accounted for—that letter with the feminine *griffe*, which he had pocketed immediately and read apart, and his hurried departure for town. Going to be married! What business had he, then, to come down there, and talk and act as though no engagement fettered him—to talk, indeed, as though no notion of matrimony had ever crossed his

mind? Could he—? No; that was impossible. He could not have been playing with her—making a fool of her? What was that he had said about difference of class in marriage? Ay, that settled the question; the *fiancée* was probably some dowdy woman, who could make a pie, and mend his clothes, and keep their maid-of-all-work in order. Well, the man was nothing to her—but she hoped he might be happy. It was getting very dull at Bissett, and she should suggest their departure to her aunt. They had invitations for several nice houses; and General Mainwaring's was not far off, and Boyce Combe was there, and Harvey Grenville; so that she should be sure of plenty of fun. She had not seen Boyce Combe since the last Woolwich ball, and then he had been so horribly absurd, and had talked such ridiculous nonsense. He was so amusing, Major Combe; and—and then Major Combe's handsome, vacuous, simpering countenance, which for a moment had risen in Barbara's mind, faded again, and in its place there came a genial, clever,

sensible face, with merry eyes and laughing mouth, and Major Combe's "ridiculous nonsense" seemed wretched balderdash as contrasted with Frank Churchill's pleasant talk.

A knock at the door, following which promptly little Miss Townshend glides into the room. A nice little girl, as I have remarked; a charming little being, bright and winning, but not the sort of person for a companion when one is in that state so well described as "out of sorts." Who, I wonder, is pleasant company for us in a real or fancied trouble? Certainly not the enthusiastic gusher who flings his or herself upon our necks, and insists upon sharing our sorrow,—which is a thorough impossibility. Certainly not the pseudo-moralist who tells us that all is for the best, and quotes Scripture, and suggests that, though we have had to retire from Palace Gardens and live in Bedford Row, there are many outcasts then sleeping on the steps of Whitechapel Church; and that, though our darling's life may be trembling in the balance, there are fever-courts and pestilence-alleys, in no house of which "there is

not one dead." Certainly not the lively friend who thinks that "rallying" is the best course for binding the broken heart and setting at rest the perturbed spirit, and who accordingly indulges in one perpetual effervescence of mild sarcasm and feeble teasing. Miss Townshend belonged to this latter class; and entered the room with a little skip and a long slide, which brought her to Barbara's side.

"Oh, ho! and so we're annoyed, are we, and won't come among our friends? We sit and sulk by ourselves, do we?"

"I cannot possibly imagine what you mean, Alice," said Barbara coldly. "Take care, please; you're standing on my dress."

"Oh, of course not, poor darling, she can't imagine! But, without any joking, Barbara, it *is* too bad."

"What is too bad, Alice?" asked Barbara, without moving a muscle. She had a tremendous power over her face, and, when she chose, looked as impassible as the Sphynx, "staring straight on with calm eternal eyes."

"Now don't be silly, Barbara dear," exclaimed Miss Townshend, who was getting rather annoyed because her friend had not gone off into hysterics. "You know well enough what I mean; and it is a shame, a horrible shame! Who would have thought that that learned clever man could have been such an incorrigible flirt? There now," putting up her hands, "you know perfectly well who I mean. And he did carry on with you in the most shameful manner—and going to be married all the time! Not that I'm sure you're not rightly served, Barbara. It's just the sort of thing you've been doing all your life, you know; but, still, one doesn't expect it in a man, does one, dear. I wonder—"

"*I* wonder when you'll have common sense, Alice. It's time, if what you told me this morning be true."

"O Barbara darling! O Barbara! don't remind me of it. Oh, how miserable you've made me! And you—you don't care one pin, when you know I'm so wretched." And putting her handkerchief to her eyes, little Miss Townshend hurried out of the room.

And what of the girl who "didn't care one pin"? who had just been rallied upon having been made a fool of by a man—a man, moreover, for whom every hour of her life proved to her that she cared? Pride, love, vexation, doubt,—all these had influence on that throbbing heart; and she flung herself on her bed in a flood of tears.

CHAPTER VII.

TOUCHING A PROPOSAL.

When Captain Lyster rose on the following morning, he had made up his mind to the commission of a very serious deed. A long course of reflection as he lay awake in the watches of the night, and the discovery, real or imaginary, of a further diminution of hair on the crown of his head, had determined him upon asking Miss Townshend to become his wife without any further delay. There was something in her fresh, cheery, pleasant manner that specially appealed to this *blasé* cynic; she was so unlike the women he had been accustomed to mix with in society, who were generally weak imitations of Barbara Lexden, or opinionless misses, who held "yea" and "nay" to be the sole ingredients necessary in their conversation; in fact, this chattering girl, who said every thing uppermost in

her mind, who had capital spirits perennially flowing, and who was natural without being either arrogant or "miss-ish," had completely enslaved him. He might have pottered on in silent admiration for some time longer, but that he had been greatly annoyed by Beresford's manner to Miss Townshend on the preceding evening; there was something in the Commissioner's easy familiarity, both during dinner and afterwards, which signally raised Lyster's wrath. He had towards Beresford that singular feeling, that compound of distrust, detestation, contempt, and fear, which we experience instinctively for any rival; and his love for this girl was far too serious a matter to permit any tampering with his plans. A good fellow, Fred Lyster; a kind-hearted, straightforward, honourable man, with very little guile; lazy, to a certain extent selfish, and considerably spoilt; but with an innate sense of right carrying him through many difficulties, and with a stout heart and a clear brain to support him under any trials.

He loved this girl, and he wanted to know whether his love was returned. To get at this

information he saw but one way—a proposal. I have before said that he knew every trick and turn of flirtation; but this was something of far deeper import than a flirtation; means which he had previously used to ascertain "how he stood" with the temporary object of his affections, and which had elicited the satisfactory glance, hand-pressure, or word, he would have now deemed degrading both to himself and to her. His regard for her had been growing throughout the past season, and was rapidly culminating. He had watched her attentively, and studied all her movements, with a satisfactory result. He felt that she was a little fast, certainly; but that fastness he was convinced resulted from the mere overflow of animal spirits, and not from any desire to please in men's eyes by affectation of men's ways. That she was an heiress, he didn't care one bit about—he had plenty for both; and if she came to him, any thing that she had should be settled on herself. But how to ask her? Ah, how long did that pair of hair-brushes remain suspended over his head,

while he gazed vacantly into the dressing-glass before him as this question rose in his mind! How often did he fling himself on the ottoman, nursing his foot and biting his lip in a perplexity of doubt! He could not go down on his knees, and offer his hand and heart, as they did on the stage; he could not write to her, either formally or spasmodically—he had a wholesome horror of committing himself on paper; he could not arrive at the knowledge he required through any third person; in fact (here the hair-brushes went to work again), there was no way but to take advantage of an opportunity, and propose. He must know his position, too, at once. He could not bear to see that fellow Beresford hanging about her as he had been the previous night. He'd do it that very day. His whole frame, which had been pleasantly cooled by his shower-bath, tingled again at the mere thought; and a faint empty feeling, something like that which he experienced when insulted in the Engineers' mess-room at Salem by Poker Cassidy, came over him. Would he get

as well out of this as out of that encounter? Then he held his own; and Cassidy, neatly drilled by a pistol-bullet through his ankle, limps with a crutch to this day. But this was a very different matter.

It was a dull breakfast that morning. Barbara sent down intelligence of a headache, and remained in her room; Miss Townshend had red rims to her pretty eyes, had no smile for any one, looked miserable, and sat silent; her papa had donned his very stiffest check cravat, and was, if possible, more pompous than usual; Sir Marmaduke had had his porridge early, had gone out, and not returned; old Miss Lexden always breakfasted in bed; and Mr. and Mrs. Vincent were utterly upset by a burnt omelette, about which they conveyed dismay to each other by eye-brow telegraph across the table. Only Major Stone was himself; and he bustled about, and made tea, and passed dishes, and joked and rallied in a way that ought to have been of service, but which signally failed. When Mr. Beresford entered the room, which was not until nearly all

the others had finished their meal, he seemed for a few moments staggered by the gravity of the assemblage; but gliding into a vacant seat by Miss Townshend's side, he soon recovered his spirits, and commenced a conversation in his accustomed bantering tone. His neighbour seemed to brighten at once, and responded in her usual cheery manner, greatly to the disgust of poor Fred Lyster, sitting opposite, who, over his cold partridge, was still hard at work on the same problem which had occupied him when over his hair-brushes, and who knew as little how to attain his end as ever. He was glad when he heard Beresford say that business would require him to ride into Brighton before luncheon, and that he must afterwards go round to the stables and see whether his hack was all right after her journey down. His joy toned down a little when Miss Townshend asked if said hack had ever carried a lady, but rose again when Beresford declared that he should be sorry to see any female friend of his on Gulnare's back.

"It isn't that she's vicious," he explained;

"there's not an ounce of vice in her. But there are so many things she can't bear—dirty children, and puddles, and stone-heaps in the road; and when she sees any of these she stands bolt upright for two minutes on her hind-legs, and then starts off with her head between her fore-legs, and nearly pulls your arms out of their sockets."

So Miss Townshend declared, with much laughter, and with many shoulder-shrugs and exclamations of fright, that she could never think of mounting "any thing so dreadful;" and Lyster, to his immense delight, saw Beresford leave the room, light a big cigar on the steps, and clear off in the direction of the stables. Stone had already departed on his various errands; Mrs. Vincent had fetched a cookery-book from the library, and with her husband had retired to study it in the embrasure of the window; and Miss Townshend, left the last at table, was playing with a fragment of toast. Lyster knew her habits—knew that she was in the habit of skimming the *Post* to learn the whereabouts

of her friends; and accordingly retreated quietly to the library.

Such a pleasant room, this! Not a bit of the wall to be seen for the dark oak book-shelves, which, crammed with books, extended from floor to ceiling on every side. A capital collection of books, in sober calf bindings (Sir Marmaduke once said that brilliant bindings and glazed book-cases always reminded him of a man with his hair parted down the middle, and could not understand what Barbara meant by asking him if Mrs. Nickleby had been a Wentworth): theology, politics, books of reference, poetry, drama, and history, all regularly ranged and properly catalogued. Fiction had a very moderate compartment allotted to it; but the round table in the middle of the room, and the ottoman at the far end, were liberally strewn with volumes bearing the omnipresent yellow ticket of Mudie. Immediately in front of the big bow-window, which was shaded by a sun-blind, and through which you gazed over a lovely expanse of down, stood a huge writing-table, on which was an inkstand

that might have held half a pint, a large blotting-pad, an oxydised-silver owl with ruby eyes erect on a paper-weight, and a bundle of quill pens, half split up, and all very much bitten at the tops; for Sir Marmaduke, who was the principal occupant of the cane writing-chair, was apt to get very energetic in his correspondence. Here, too, the old gentleman indulged in the one literary occupation of his life—certain translations of Horace, which he altered and polished year after year, intending some time or other to show them to an old college friend, and then have a gorgeous edition printed on toned paper for private circulation. Here, in a huge iron safe, were kept big ledgers, and account-books of rents, rates, and expenditure on the estate, which gave three days' solemn investigation every quarter to Sir Marmaduke and Major Stone; whereat there was much head-rubbing, many appealing looks to the ceiling, and much secret checking of fingers under the table, and reference to a ready-reckoner on the part of both gentlemen. And here, in a secret drawer of the writing-table, lay a little

packet, which the old man would take out occasionally, would open, and sit gazing for half an hour together at the contents. They were not much,—a faded blue ribbon, once worn, with a little locket attached to it, round the throat of his old love at the Bath Assemblies, where he first met her; a curl of hair, cut from her head after death; and an ivory miniature, by Stump, of a dark girl, with big brown eyes, and her hair banded tight to her forehead, and gathered into a large bow at the top of the head. After an inspection of this drawer the old gentleman would walk to the looking-glass, and glaring at his own reflection therein, would shake his head in a very solemn manner; he would be very mild and quiet, and, as Gumble noticed, would drink an extra bottle of claret during the evening.

When Lyster entered the room, he was annoyed to see that it was occupied. Old Mr. Russell, the lawyer, was at the writing-table; and Mr. Townshend was seated in an easy-chair close by, listening to the narration of some thick parchment deed which the lawyer was going through. Their

business was apparently at an end, though; for Mr. Townshend said, "Then it's satisfactory, Mr. Russell?" to which the old gentleman, with nothing but his finger-tips visible below his cuffs, replied, "I think we may assume so;" and both gentlemen rose and left the room. Being in a highly nervous state, Lyster did not like these proceedings a bit. He wondered what that portentous-looking parchment was about—whether it had any reference to old Townshend's testamentary disposition; whether it had any thing to do with Miss Townshend. He thought he rather hated that old Russell, though he had not much idea why. His time was coming on now; he wondered how much longer before Miss Townshend would fetch the *Post*. Here it was, on the round table, with the other papers. He took one up and looked at it; but the type all ran together before his eyes, so he laid it down again, and walked up to the mantelshelf, and glared at the big black clock in the middle, and pulled the spear through the perforated fist of the bronze Diana on the top, and pushed it backwards and forwards; and then walking to the writing-table, lit a Vesta-

match and blew it out. He plunged his hands into his pockets, and looked down at his boots, apparently intently scrutinising their make, in reality not seeing them in the least; then he took up a hare's-foot-handled paper-knife and tapped his teeth with it, threw it down, and commenced a Polar-bear-like promenade of the room.

The clock ticked solemnly on, and Captain Lyster was still pacing up and down, when the door opened and Miss Townshend entered. She seemed surprised to see any one in the room, and declared that she would not remain a minute, and that she would take the greatest care not to disturb the Captain, who, she said with a smile, was evidently, from his perturbed expression, engaged upon the composition of an epic poem or other intense literary effort. At this remark the Captain grinned feebly, and besought the young lady not to mind his eccentricities, as he was full of them, though he was bound to confess he had never been mad enough to contemplate writing a poem. And then Miss Townshend smiled again, and seated herself at the round table, and taking up the *Post*

turned to the "Fashionable Intelligence," and was at once engrossed in the study of who was where, and at what country seats "select circles" were being "hospitably entertained." Lyster went to the writing-table, and began ornamenting the blotting pad with many spirited sketches, wondering all the time whether he should get any better chance for his contemplated announcement, or whether he should plunge into it at once. At last he thought he had an opportunity. Miss Townshend suddenly exclaimed, "O Captain Lyster, here's news for you! You recollect Mary Considine? Yes, I should think you did. Those private theatricals at the Fenton's, where you and she—oh, I haven't forgotten it. Well, there's something about her here; listen: 'We understand that a matrimonial alliance will shortly take place between the Honourable Mary Considine, youngest daughter of Lord Torraghmore, and Major Burt, of the Life Guards.' That's Harry Burt, the straw-coloured one, isn't it? Poor Captain Lyster! doomed to wear the willow."

The chance, the chance at last!

"Surely, Miss Townshend," he commenced, "you cannot imagine that I ever seriously entertained any regard for Miss Considine. A very pleasant young lady, full of spirits, and highly amusing, but not possessing the qualities which one would look for in a wife. And you—can you imagine that in a house where *you* were—where I was in the habit of seeing *you*—. Done, by Jove!"

The last sentence, uttered under his breath, was evoked by the opening of the door, and the entrance of Mr. Townshend, who looked more like the Ace of Clubs than ever when he saw the couple in apparently close conversation. He at once approached his daughter, and asked her if she had "written that letter?" She said, with some tremulousness, "No." Mr. Townshend then raised his voice, and said he must beg—and with him "beg" sounded marvellously like "insist"—that she would do it at once. So the young lady, albeit with tears in her eyes, went dutifully off to obey her father's behests; the old gentleman sat down to the *Times*,

while Lyster glared at him from behind a book, and wondered whether one could possibly call a man to account for interrupting one's conversation with his daughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOUCHING ANOTHER PROPOSAL.

Mr. Beresford meanwhile had strolled round to the stables, ascertained that, with the exception of the loss of a little hair from her off-hock, Gulnare seemed none the worse for her journey (horses never travel by rail without a something), ordered his groom to bring her round in half an hour's time, and made a cursory inspection of the other horses while finishing his cigar. At the time appointed he mounted and rode away into Brighton, starting at first over the Downs in a brisk canter, but gradually subsiding into a checked walk, which ill suited Gulnare's fiery disposition, and made her rider break the current of his thoughts by several behests of "Steady now!" "Quiet, old lady;" and such like. Indeed, Mr. Beresford had quite enough

subject-matter for reflection. He, too, had been turning over in his mind the expediency of proposing to Miss Townshend, and had almost decided upon its being the right thing to do. The objection which he had urged in his discussion with Kate Mellon, that money and ugliness generally went together, would not hold good here. Miss Townshend was pretty and presentable; she was not clever, certainly; but so long as she was able to talk about Shakespeare and the musical glasses, that was all which the world would require of her in the way of conversation, and that sort of jargon would be easily picked up. She knew passably sufficient of the accomplishments of society, and was, as times went, in a very good set. Her people belonged to the plutocracy; but Beresford liked that rather than otherwise, recollecting how far pleasanter than the sham state and starveling magnificence of some of his aristocratic friends were the town-houses and country places of City magnates and merchant princes, where every thing, from the sleek porter in the hall to the

new and massive salt-spoons on the table, spoke of wealth. To ascertain whether his venture was a safe one was the object of Beresford's visit to Brighton. He had known so many mushroom magnates, who, after a couple of seasons of full-blown pride, had collapsed and tumbled into the mud from which they sprung, that he took no man's monetary position on hearsay. He had met Mr. Townshend at capital houses, and had seen his name in many apparently excellent City ventures; but, then, had he not met at the Duke of Banffshire's Mr. Poyntz, the great railway contractor, who two months afterwards smashed for a million and a half? and did not half the peerage welcome as a friend and respect as a banker the great Mr. Shoddy, who was at that moment engaged in oakum-picking in expiation of his fraudulent practices? There must be no mistake on this head; it would be a pretty thing if he, Charles Beresford, were not merely to find himself after a year or two with a penniless wife upon his hands, but were also to have the world talking about his *mésalliance*.

As to the idea of rejection, that had scarcely entered his head. He was generally liked by women, and thought Miss Townshend no exception to the rule. Her father perhaps might look for money, and then he should have to square him as best he could. But Beresford argued to himself: these *nouveaux riches* generally look for position; and if they cannot get rank for their girls, they like a good official connexion. Did not Petter marry the daughter of old Dunkel, the West-India merchant (by the by she was a little woolly, though), simply through his being Secretary to the Lakes and Fisheries Department? And a Commissioner at the Tin-Tax ranked higher than that. Walbrook delighted to talk of "my son-in-law's connexion with the Government;" and Dowgate Hill rejoiced in seeing a fourth-rate Cabinet Minister or occasional Secretaries of Foreign Legations, much beribboned, at his daughter's drums. As to whether he cared for the girl, it scarcely entered into his mind to inquire; they would get on well enough; he would let her have her own way, so long as

she did not interfere with him; he should keep up his hunting, but cut play of every kind; and if he got at all bored, why then he would go into Parliament. Fortunately, he thought, he was not like most men: he could get married without its interfering with any body; there was no "establishment" to break up; no inhabitant of a Brompton villa to tear her hair and use strong language until a liberal settlement was made; no jealous girls to upbraid and— As the thought of Kate Mellon and the recollection of his last interview with her flashed into Beresford's mind, he started involuntarily, and touched the mare with his spur. Gulnare jumped into the air, and started off like an arrow. By the time he pulled her up, he was at the top of St. James's Street, Brighton; and as he leisurely rode down the hill, he revolved in his mind the means of arriving at an immediate knowledge of his intended father-in-law's stability.

He was not long in arriving at his determination. Of all the men he knew, Simnel, the secretary at the Tin-Tax Office, was the most know-

ing; and he and Beresford were on the most intimate terms. Had Beresford been in town, he would have consulted Simnel personally about this marriage business; as it was, he thought that the secretary was the likeliest man to get for him the information he required. This information must be had at once; as, once satisfied, he would not give another evening's chance to Lyster or that man Churchill, in whose wheel he had put so neat a spoke, but would commence immediately to clear the course on which he hoped to win. So he turned into the Old Steine, and leisurely dismounting at the door of the telegraph-office, resigned Gulnare into the hands of a passing boy, to whom he was so intent on giving instructions as to walking her gently up and down, that he did not observe "that man Churchill" pass him in an open fly, the driver of which must have been stimulated by the prospect of a large reward, as his horse was proceeding at a pace very rarely undertaken by Brighton fly-cattle. But perfectly ignorant of the propinquity of the gentleman with whose

family history he had recently manifested so intimate an acquaintance, Mr. Beresford entered the telegraph-office, and taking up one of the printed slips, wrote the following message:

"*C. B., Brighton, to Robert Simnel, Tin-Tax Office, Rutland House, London.*

"*Non olet pecunia.* Whether a round game with Townshend of Queensbury Gardens would repay the necessary illumination. Reply; figures, if possible."

The clerk counted the words and grinned. When Beresford, after saying that he would call for the answer, paid and walked out, the clerk carried the paper into the inner room where the manipulator was busy with his ever-clicking needles, and read the message out to him, grinning again; whereupon they both expressed opinion that it was a "rum start," and another of those "games" which supplied the interesting youths employed by the Electric Telegraph Company with so many topics of conversation.

Mr. Beresford put up his horse at a livery-stable, and then walked down towards the sea to

while away the time until the answer should arrive. He knew Brighton thoroughly. He was a regular visitor from Saturday till Tuesday during November and December, when he stayed at the Bedford, and generally dined at the cavalry mess; but he had never seen the place in its autumnal aspect. Those who only know Brighton in the winter would scarcely recognise her in September, when she has more the aspect of Ramsgate or Margate. In place of the dashing carriages, flys at half-a-crown an hour crawl up and down the King's Road, the horses, perfectly accustomed to the dreary job, ambling along at their own sleepy pace; the riding-masters are still to the fore, but for pupils, instead of the brilliant *écuyères*, they have heavy, clumsy girls in hired habits and hideous hats. All the officers of the cavalry regiment who can get leave, take it; and those who cannot, devote themselves to tobacco in the solitude of their barrack-rooms. The Esplanade is thronged with fat people from the metropolitan suburbs, gorgeous Hebrews with their families from the Minories, and lawyers' clerks with a week's holiday. The beach is covered

with children stone-digging and feet-wetting; with girls who have just bathed, with their hair down their backs, and girls who are waiting for machines; with men selling shell-toys, and women imploring purchase of crochet-dolls; with hilarious men throwing sticks for their dogs to swim after; with contemplative men reading books, and gazing off them vacantly across the sea; with drowsy men, supine, with their hats shading their faces from the sun. The whole place is changed; the rich hotel and shopkeepers have gone inland (Tunbridge Wells is a favourite place of theirs) for relaxation, and their substitutes, goaded into madness by the unchanging blue sky and burning brick pavement, are bearish and morose; men wear plaid shooting-coats of vivid patterns in the afternoon, and women, in flapping hats with draggled feathers, promenade in the Pavilion; Brill's swimming-bath shuts up for painting and decoration; and there are people seen walking on the Chain Pier.

In this abnormal state of affairs Mr. Beresford found himself any thing but happy. He went to

Mutton's and had some soup, and to Folthorp's and read the papers; he strolled down the King's Road, and inspected the evolutions of various young ladies who were disporting in the waves, and indulging the passers-by with the gambols of Bloomsbury-super-Mare. Then he put his legs up on a bench on the Esplanade, and smoked a cigar, and stared at the passers-by; and then, after the lapse of a couple of hours, he walked back to the telegraph-office, where he found a reply waiting for him. It was from Mr. Simnel, and merely said:

"*Olet.* Three stars in Leadenhall Street and Director of L. B. & S. C. meaning ten thou. Plated heavily. If with good hand, play game."

CHAPTER IX.

"A LITTLE PROUD, BUT FULL OF PITY."*

ALTHOUGH only twenty-four hours absent from Bissett, Frank Churchill during that short period had undergone more mental conflict than is often suffered by many men in a course of years. He had had full time for reflection, and had availed himself of it to the utmost. While within the charmed circle he was necessarily under fascination; but now, although the witch was any thing but exorcised, he felt sufficiently himself to collect his thoughts, and he saw the absolute necessity of coming to some fixed determination as to his future conduct before he returned. Often before had he had occasion to weigh matters almost as important as this, though of course of a different character; and he

* Ben Jonson.

was not the man to blink one jot of the attendant difficulties, or to over-persuade himself as to the feasibility of his designs simply because he wished them carried out. He was in love with this girl, then; he supposed that must be granted? at all events, by analysis and comparison, that was easily ascertained. Though, as the world goes, his life had been tolerably pure, he had in his student-days, and in the time immediately subsequent, had his *amourettes* and flirtations like the rest; but when he remembered what had been his feelings for Gretchen, the fat and fair daughter of Anton Schütz, the beery saddler; for Ernestine, the sentimental heiress of the Graf von Triebenfeld; for Eugénie and Olympe, vestals of the Quartier Latin; or for any of the half-hundred young ladies with whom during the earlier portion of his London career he had gone through the usual bouquet-sending, cotillon-dancing, Botanical-Fête-meeting flirtation,—he recognised at once that this was a very different matter. Breakers ahead and all round! As for Barbara, he felt conscious of no vanity in avowing to himself his perception of

having excited her interest, but whether sufficiently to induce her to listen to an offer he could not imagine. Possibly, probably, she looked to making a brilliant marriage: her beauty and accomplishments were her capital, and should be turned to good purpose; and yet, as this idea passed through his mind, he had an instinctive feeling that Barbara's proud spirit would revolt from any such match, however much it might be pressed on her by her relations. Her relations! ay, even granting the girl's acquiescence, *there* would be one of the grand sources of difficulty: old Miss Lexden, rich, selfish, and narrow-minded, would doubtless oppose such a marriage in every possible way; and how would Sir Marmaduke look upon him, having come an invited and a welcome guest, and then brought this discord into the family? And even suppose it arranged somehow, she consenting and her friends satisfied, what was to be done with his mother, with whom and in whose house he then resided? how and where was the rest of her life to be passed? He could not live far from the office, where, thrice a week always, and occasionally

more frequently, he was engaged till past midnight; and how would the brilliant beauty of the West be able to exist in the dreary fastnesses of Great Adullam Street, or the arid desert of Tiglath-Pileser Square? And then the narrow income —competence for one, a bare sufficiency for two! His horse must be given up, but that he would not so much mind; his Club (the Retrenchment) must be kept on, for business purposes, though he should of course never spend any money there; and he must take to sixteen-shilling trousers, and that sort of thing: all easy enough. But for her?—no brougham (and fancy those tiny high-heeled *bottines* over the villanous Mesopotamian pavement!), only an occasional Opera-box obtained from the *Statesman* (situation high, surroundings queer, *claqueurs* and *amis des artistes*), two or three balls in the season, and perhaps one dinner-party at home, with the inevitable side-dishes and attendant carpet-beater. Ay, and worse beyond!—children born and reared in that dingy atmosphere, further expenditure to be met, perhaps sickness to be struggled through, and all the household gods dependent

on him,—on the soundness of his health and the clearness of his brain, which failing, what had they to look to? *Aïe de me!* that last thought settled the question. Let it fade out, pleasant dream that it was; or rather let him crush it for ever! It was impossible, and so let it pass. Down go the Spanish castles, away melt the aerial estates; Duty's foot kicks away Alnaschar's basket, and there is the hard, dry, unsympathetic, work-a-day world before him! He will go back to Bissett, but only for a day, just to get his traps together and to make some plausible excuse, and then will start off. This first week of his holiday has been any thing but rest, and rest he requires. He will go to Scarborough—no! not there, for reasons; but to some watering-place, and pitch pebbles into the sea and lie fallow until he is compelled to return to work. Yes, that is the right course—he determines on it finally as the train nears the Brighton station; hopes must be crushed, and Duty must be obeyed. Duty has won the day for once—and where is the pearl-gray glove now? At his lips, of course! Frank Churchill has resolved upon doing his duty,

and, like the drunkard in the old story, is "treating resolution."

Anxiety to test his newly-formed determination must be strong, for he ordered the flyman to drive as hard as he could to Bissett; but, cooling a little, dismissed the man at the lodge-gates, and strolled through the avenue towards the house. The leaves yet held their own; scarcely the slightest autumnal tint had fallen on them; and the grand old avenue looked magnificent. The weather was splendid; the sun shone brightly, while the air was clear and bracing; deer bounded in the bushwood; and as Churchill stood rejoicing in the lovely view, a cart, laden with game, and driven by little Joe Lubbock, the head-keeper's boy, emerged from the Home Copse, and made a pleasant feature in the landscape. All around told of wealth and peace and English comfort; and as Churchill surveyed the scene, he felt (as he had often felt) how great were the enjoyments of those born to such heritage, and (as he had never felt) how well-disposed he should be for the sake of those enjoyments to undertake the necessary responsibilities. His Radicalism was

of the very mildest nature; the free and independent electors of Brighton or of Southwark would have scorned the feebleness of his ideas as to the requirements of the people; he had no wish to alter the laws of primogeniture, nor to see the furniture designed by Gillow or Holland emblazoned with the "swart mechanic's bloody thumbs;"—indeed, it must be confessed that he thought the "swart mechanic," when out of his place and wrong-headed through false leading, a very objectionable person. But he was in love, and wanted money and position to enable him to forward his suit; and as the thought of some who had both and did good with neither flitted across him, he stamped impatiently on the gravel, and the fair view and all the sweet excellence of nature faded out before his eyes.

He walked hurriedly on for a few paces, and then bethought him that somewhere close in the neighbourhood was the gate leading to the fir-plantation in which he had recently walked with Barbara on their return from the shooting-party. He had the whole afternoon to do nothing in, and

it would be pleasant to renew the remembrance of that happy jesting talk. Memory, he thought rather bitterly, was a luxury which it did not require either rank or riches to enjoy. He struck across the dry crisp turf, and arrived at the gate; it opened on a short gravelled walk, with low palings on either side, terminating in a rustic stile, on the other side of which lay the fir-plantation. As Churchill entered the path he saw a figure seated on the stile at the other end, and in an instant knew it to be Barbara Lexden. Her head was bent, and she was leaning forward, idly tracing figures on the turf with the point of her parasol. Churchill advanced with a strange fluttering of his usually regular-beating heart; but she did not appear to hear his footstep until he was close behind her, when she suddenly turned round, and their eyes met. It was a trying time for both, but Barbara was the first to speak.

"So soon back, Mr. Churchill? We—that is, Sir Marmaduke was led to believe that you would not return until the end of the week."

"Fortunately, Miss Lexden, my business in

town was soon finished" ("Question of settlement with the lawyer, or naming the day with the lady," thought Barbara), "and I got back as quickly as I could. How lovely this place looks! Perhaps it seems doubly beautiful after twenty-four hours in London; but it appears to me even fresher, calmer, and more peaceful than when I left it."

"That, I suspect, is your poetic imagination, Mr. Churchill. You were praising Dryden the other night, and can now quote him to your own purposes. You know he says:

> 'Winds murmured through the leaves his short delay,
> And fountains o'er their pebbles chid his stay;
> But, with his presence cheered, they cease to mourn,
> And walks seem fresher green at his return.'"

"Aptly quoted, though the lines were addressed to a lady, and for 'his' read 'your.' I don't think that even the fountains in Trafalgar Square would be weak enough to 'chide my stay.' But, apropos of poetic imagination, I am afraid I disturbed you from some deep reverie."

"You never were more mistaken," said Bar-

bara, with a short laugh. "I—I came out on a much more unromantic expedition. I lost a glove a day or two ago, and—and fancied I might have dropped it somewhere here."

"Is this it?" asked Churchill suddenly, taking from his pocket a morocco-leather case, and producing from it the much-prized pearl-gray.

"Yes," said Barbara, glancing quickly at him from under her drooping eyelids; "that is it. How very fortunate!"

"I picked it up," said Churchill, "as we returned from the shooting-party the other day, and intended restoring it sooner, but forgot it. I am glad to be able to do so now." He handed her the glove, looked her straight in the face, and walked on silently by her side.

"We have had a new arrival here since you left," said Barbara, after a pause, swinging the glove slowly to and fro; "a Mr. Beresford. You know him?"

"Beresford? Oh, of the Tin-Tax Office! I have met him."

"You are on intimate terms?"

"I—I have not that honour. Mr. Beresford moves in a different set to mine."

"That question of 'sets' seems to be one of paramount importance with you, Mr. Churchill. How frequently you harp upon it!"

"It is a question which we must necessarily bear in mind, Miss Lexden," said Churchill, with emphasis; then smiling, added,—"*Suum cuique*, which is Latin, and unintelligible; 'the cobbler and his last,' which is English and vernacular. But why did you ask?"

"Simply because he seems amusing, and likely to be popular here. I am sorry we shall not have the opportunity of profiting by his high spirits, as aunt and I will probably be leaving on Thursday."

One quick glance told her that this shot, if intended for mischief, had signally failed. With perfect calmness Churchill replied,

"And I also must manage to survive the loss of Mr. Beresford's conversation, as I go to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Barbara; then, in

her ordinary tone, "Ah, to be sure, you have of course so much to do."

"Well," said Churchill, smiling, "for a month I hope to do little beyond mooning on the beach and throwing pebbles into the sea."

"Yes," said Barbara quickly; "that is, I believe, the usual thing under the circumstances. And the place? the Isle of Wight, or Devonshire, of course?"

"Under the circumstances!" he echoed. "I beg your pardon, Miss Lexden, but I fear we are at cross purposes. Under what circumstances?"

("He braves it out to the last," thought Barbara; "who would have thought that he could have stooped to a shuffle, or degrade the woman he was engaged to, by tacitly ignoring the fact?") Then she said, curling her lip, and tossing the glove with a slightly contemptuous gesture,

"Good news travels fast, Mr. Churchill. The fact of your forthcoming marriage is known at Bissett."

"*My* forthcoming marriage? It's a joke, Miss Lexden?"

"We have heard it as a fact."

"And *you* believed it?" said Churchill, turning white, while his lip trembled visibly as he spoke.

"Why should I not?" After a pause, and in a low voice, "Then you are not going to be married?"

"Married, no! Miss Lexden, you must now listen patiently to what I should otherwise have kept secret, knowing the folly I have been guilty of. If ever I marry, Barbara Lexden will be my wife!"

She started, and seemed about to speak.

"One moment more," said he. "You know how completely I understand the difference in our position?" (An impatient gesture from Barbara.) "My sensitiveness, pride—call it what you will—would have kept me silent. Now I have spoken, and—Barbara—you must not keep me in suspense. Could it ever be possible?"

Perfectly colourless, she leant against the stile, but said nothing.

"Miss Lexden, you *must* end this doubt."

Silently she placed the little glove in his hand.

"Barbara! *my* Barbara!" and she was folded to his heart.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE TIN-TAX OFFICE, No. 120.

THE Tin-Tax Office, as I have before had occasion to remark, is situated in a wing of Rutland House; that noble building so well known to most Englishmen, whence are issued those concise documents relating to unpaid arrears of public imposts, and where the mulcting of the nation is carried on. The Tin-Tax is by no means a bad office, as times go; though it is rather looked down upon by the men in the Check and Counter-Check Department, and the Navigation Board, who have offices in the same building. It used to be a great point of humour with the wits of twenty years since to say that the appointments in the Tin-tax Office were given to sons of the faithful butlers of patriotic peers, and to those eager constituents for whose placing-out in life the Members for Irish boroughs

are always petitioning with energy and perseverance worthy of the horse-leech's daughters. And, indeed, the manners and customs of some of the middle-aged clerks bear testimony to the truth of this report. They were good enough fellows in their day—blundered on at their offices from ten till four; dined cheaply at Short's, or Bertholini's, or the Cock; went half-price to the Adelphi; occasionally supped at the Coal-Hole or the Cider Cellars; and went home to their garrets in Islington with the perfect idea that they were roystering dogs, and that the world did not contain many men who had drained pleasure's goblet more thoroughly to the dregs than themselves. Most of them married betimes—occasionally the landlady of their lodgings; more frequently the pallid daughter of some fellow-clerk, after a flirtation begun over a round game or "a little music;" most frequently some buxom lass met at seaside boarding-house, or in the old paternal home, where they spent their leave of absence. But we have changed all that; and junior clerks of the present day are thoroughly and entirely different from

their predecessors: the establishment of the Civil-Service Commission, and the ordination of promotion by merit, have sent quite a different class of men into the public service, and the subordinate appointments of the Tin-Tax Office are held by men who have taken their degrees at Oxford; who can turn "Vilikins and his Dinah" into Greek iambics; who can tell you where Montenegro is, and what it wants; who have thoroughly mastered the Schleswig-Holstein question; who are well up in the theory of thermo-dynamics; and who dip into Jean Paul Richter for a little light reading;—all excellent accomplishments, and thoroughly useful in the Tin-Tax Office.

It is half-past twelve on a fine Saturday morning in the beginning of October, and the six occupants of room No. 120 are all assembled, and all at work; that is to say, four of them are writing, one is looking vacantly out of the window, and one is reading the *Times*. No. 120 is at the top of the building; a pleasant room when you reach it, looking on to the river, but up four flights of steep stone stairs. No. 120 has always its regular

number of occupants; for when the chief clerk learns that a young gentleman has an undue number of friends calling upon him during official hours, he causes the popular man to be removed to No. 120, and after two trials of the stairs the visitors prefer meeting their friend in the evening at some less Alpine retreat. So also, when a young gentleman is in the habit of being perpetually waited upon by duns, he makes interest to get moved into No. 120, and finds that his creditors simultaneously urge their demands not in person, but through the medium of the Post-office. The head of the room is Mr. Kinchenton, that tall man with the rounded shoulders, and grizzled head ever bent over his desk. Hard work has bowed Mr. Kinchenton's back and silvered his hair; for he has been in the Tin-Tax Office since he was sixteen years old, and though promoted under the old system of seniority and length of service, no one could ever say that he had not fairly won every step he got. Before he was sixteen, he was the hope and pride—the prize scholar—of the Heckmondike Grammar-School, his father being head-

keeper to Lord Heckmondike, who placed the boy on the foundation of the school, and, finding him apt and studious, obtained for him his appointment from the Government of the day. No Adelphi at half-price, no Cider Cellars or Coal-Hole, for young Kinchenton, who had a little bedroom in a little terrace close by Kennington Common, where he was to be found every night, book in hand, and happy as a prince. A poor little bedroom enough! —a wretched little bedroom, with a white-dimity-covered tester-bed, two rush-bottomed chairs, a painted chest of drawers, a rickety washhand-stand, and a maddening square of looking-glass hanging against the wall. But to that garret came Sancho Panza and the gaunt Don his master; came Gil Blas, and the beggar with his arquebuse, and the Archbishop of Grenada; came cringing Tartuffe, and preposterous Sganarelle; came wandering Rasselas and sage Imlac; came Ferdinand Count Fathom, swearing Tom Pipes, and decorous Mr. Blifil. There the hardworking clerk laughed over Falstaff's lovemaking and Malvolio's disgrace, or wept over Sterne's dead ass and Le Fevre's

regained sword; while his comrades Mace and Flukes were ruining each other at billiards, and Potter and Piper were hiccuping noisy applause to indecent songs.

When Mr. Kinchenton was forty years old, his income had reached the bewildering amount of four hundred a year, and he thought he might indulge in the luxury of a wife; so he took to himself a pretty little soft-eyed girl, the daughter of an old gentleman who was a traveller in the straw-bonnet line, and who, when he was not driving about in a very high four-wheeled trap which did its best to look like a mail-phaeton and signally failed in the attempt, lived in the little terrace next door to Kinchenton's lodgings. After his daughter's marriage, the old gentleman, who was a widower, gave up travelling, retired upon his savings, and went to live with his son-in-law in a little house which Kinchenton had taken in Camden Town, where the birth of a son crowned Kinchenton's happiness. His adoration of this child was his weakest point: he was always narrating its wonderful deeds to every body; and the men in the

office, with whom the little fellow was really a favourite, knew they could always get late attendance overlooked or half-holiday granted if they asked after little Percy, and sent him some trifling present.

It is well for the junior clerks of No. 120 that Mr. Kinchenton is the head of the room; for the next in seniority, Mr. Dibb, is by no means a pleasant person. Harsh, stiff, sectarian bigotry lurks in his coarse, close-cropped black hair, and in the plaited folds of his huge white neck-cloth; he invariably wears a black dress-coat, waistcoat, and trousers, creaking boots, and damp cloth gloves. He is always ailing, and invariably changing his medical system: now vaunting the virtues of blue-pill, now swearing by homœopathy; he has been rubbed and cracked and shampooed and galvanised; and once he tried hydropathy, but came back in a week from Malvern no better, and apparently no cleaner, than before his visit to Dr. Gully. He was one of the first-fruits of the noble system of promotion by merit, having been transferred to Rutland House from some provincial

stronghold of the Tin-Tax Office, and report said that he had originally been a schoolmaster in Bilston. He was hated by nearly all his juniors, but respected by the heads for his conscientiousness and power of work; and he was located in No. 120 to neutralise, to some extent, Mr. Kinchenton's excess of good nature. The rank and file of No. 120 consisted of Mr. Prescott and Mr. Pringle, junior clerks; Mr. Boppy, an old gentleman with a bald head and a double eye-glass, who had arrived, through dint of long service, at a good income, who was utterly useless, and who had no characteristic save his intense dread of his wife; and Mr. Crump, who had been for twenty years an extra clerk, and who, owing to an invincible stutter, had never been able to interest any one sufficiently to procure him an appointment.

"Devilish hot!" said Mr. Pringle, a short, good-humoured-looking young man, laying down his *Times* and opening his waistcoat; "devilish hot! Crump, there's a good fellow, open the door."

Mr. Crump looked up from his work, and said

appealingly, "I've got a st— a st—st—" he would have said "stiff neck;" but long before he could reach the word, Pringle interrupted him—

"Strong hand; you've got a strong hand, I know, and the door sticks; that's why I asked you. Boppy, my boy, I've not yet had time to ask you how you are."

"Well, I'm well in health, thank you, Mr. Pringle," said Mr. Boppy, depositing his pen on the desk, and rubbing his bald forehead; "but I'm rather worried in my mind."

"What troubles my Boppy? Has the Bank reduced its rate of discount, so that my Boppy's ingots are not worth quite so much per cent as they were yesterday; or is it love that is sending him to grief? Has my Boppy been sporting with Amaryllis in the shady side of Brompton Row, and has Mrs. B. found it out? Oh, Bop!"

"Nonsense, Mr. Pringle! I—"

"I must say that such remarks as those," interrupted Mr. Dibb, "appear to me to be very bad jokes."

"Very likely, Mr. Dibb," retorted Pringle; "but that's because you're the quintessence of

humour yourself. We can't all hope to make ourselves as thoroughly genial and pleasant as you—can we, Crump?"

"I d—decline to s— to s— to say—"

"To say ditto to Dibb! Of course: you're my friend, and I knew you'd never desert me. Now, Boppy, you were about to say something when you were interrupted in that gentlemanly manner by our friend J. Miller; what was it?"

"Oh, I was merely thinking that I'd try and take that dog home this afternoon, and I'm rather doubtful as to how my wife will receive it. You see, I bought him a week ago, and Simmons, the hall-porter here, has kept him for me in the coal-cellar since then. He's a white Pomeranian dog, and the coal-cellar don't suit him somehow; but I daren't take him to Putney until I'd somewhat prepared Mrs. B.'s mind. So last night I read her several anecdotes of dogs, where they were all faithful and friendly and clean, you know; and this afternoon I shall take Spitz home, and—and say you gave him to me, I think, Mr. Pringle, if you've no objection."

"Certainly, if you like it, I don't mind; any thing you please, Boppy, my boy. Dogs as many as you like, and things of that sort; only, if Mrs. B. ever finds white-kid gloves, or locks of hair, or patchouli-scented pink notes, don't say they come from me—you understand? By the way, that reminds me. Prescott! p'st! Prescott!"

A tall, good-looking man of two or three-and-twenty, who was leaning his head on one hand and staring out of the window, turned round and said dreamily, "What?"

"What an amusing companion you are!" said Mr. Pringle; "what a charming remark that was when you last spoke, an hour and twenty minutes ago! What was it?"

"Don't be an idiot, Pringle!"

"No, it wasn't that; to be told to avoid an impossibility would have struck me as novel. Never mind; I was going to ask who that was I saw you speaking to at the King's Cross Terminus yesterday."

"At King's Cross?" said Prescott, colouring; "oh, that was a friend of mine, a clergyman."

"Ah!" said Pringle, quietly, "I thought so. He had on a blue bonnet and a black-lace shawl. Neat foot he's got; those parsons are always so particular about their stockings!"

"Don't be an ass, George!" growled Prescott, in an undertone.

"All right, old boy!" said Pringle, in the same key. "Forgot we weren't alone. Nobody heard, I think; but I'll soon change the subject;" and he commenced whistling *Il Bacio*, loud and shrill.

"Mr. Pringle! Mr. Pringle!" screamed Mr. Dibb.

Mr. Pringle held up his hand as if deprecating interruption until he had come to the end of the bar, when he said, with mock politeness, "Sir to you!"

"How often have I begged you, sir, not to whistle during official hours? It is impossible for me to write my minutes while you're whistling."

"Write your minutes!" said Mr. Pringle. "Sir, we have the authority of A. Tennyson,

Esquire, the Poet of the Age, if my honourable friend in the Isle of Wight will so permit me to call him, for saying that

'Lightlier move the minutes fledged with music.'

Though that even my whistling could make your minutes move lightly, with due respect to Alfred, I doubt."

"Mr. Kinchenton," cried Mr. Dibb, now a dirty white with rage, "I must request you, as head of this room, to call upon Mr. Pringle not to forget himself."

"My dear sir," said Pringle, "there's no one I think of so much."

"George," said Mr. Kinchenton quietly, "pray be quiet!"

"Certainly, Padre; I'm dumb! Thank Heaven and the Early Closing Association, to-day's a half holiday, and we cut it at two."

"Ah, to be sure!" said Kinchenton, anxious to atone for even the slight show of authority which his previous words might have suggested; "there are grand doings this afternoon at the Eyres', at Hampstead. I'm going to take my

Percy there. Athletic sports, running, leaping, and all the rest of it."

"Ha! ha!" said Pringle; "at the Eyres', eh?

'The merry brown Eyres come leaping,'

as Kingsley has it. What a pity they haven't asked me!"

"You're going, Prescott, I suppose?" asked Kinchenton. "The Eyres are friends of yours—you're going to their fête?"

"I! no, Padre," was the reply; "I'm not going."

"Oh, he's very bad!" said Pringle, in a whisper. "He's got it awfully, but he'll get better.

'Now he has turned himself wholly to love and follows a damsel,
Caring no more for honour, or glory, or Pallas Athené.'

Kingsley again—hem!"

"I wonder, Mr. Pringle," said Mr. Dibb, "that you do not attempt to form some more permanent style of reading than the mere poetry, scraps of which you are always quoting. For my

own part, I consider poetry the flimsiest kind of writing extant."

"I'm surprised at that, now," said Pringle placidly. "I should have thought that you would have been a great appreciator of the gloomy and Byronic verse. To understand that properly, you must have lost all digestive power; and you know, Mr. Dibb, that your liver is horribly out of order."

A general laugh followed this remark, in which even Mr. Kinchenton joined, and at which Mr. Dibb looked more savage than ever. In the midst of it the clock struck two, and at the last sound Mr. Crump closed his blotting-book, put on his hat, and vanished, saying "G—good" as he passed through the door; two minutes afterwards, fragments of the word "d—day" were heard reverberating in the passage. Simultaneously Mr. Boppy struck work and went to look after his dog, Mr. Dibb stalked off without a word, and Mr. Prescott took off his coat to wash his hands previous to departure. When he emerged from the washing cupboard, he found Pringle waiting for him: both the young men shook hands with their chief, sent

their loves to Mrs. Kinchenton and the boy, and turned out into the Strand.

They had not gone far when Pringle asked his companion whither he was bound. Prescott was too absorbed to hear the question, but, on its repetition, muttered something about an "engagement out Kensington way."

"Ah!" said Pringle, with the nearest approach to a sigh, "ride a cock horse, eh? the old game! Look here, Jim, old fellow. I'm not clever, you know, but I know how many blue beans make five; and I'm not strait-laced or pious or any thing of that sort, but I'm very fond of you, and I tell you this won't do!"

"What won't do?" asked Prescott, with a flaming face.

"Why, this Kate Mellon business, Jim. It's on hot and strong, I know. You've been down in the mouth all the time she was away; you met her at the station yesterday, and probably you're going up to her place to day. Now you know, Jim, I've seen more of life than you, and I tell you this is all wrong."

"Why, you don't imagine that there's any thing—?"

"I don't imagine any thing at all. I haven't got any imagination, I think. I'm the most matter-of-fact beggar that ever walked; but I know you're confoundedly spooney and hard hit, and in a wrong quarter. Now, Jim, pull yourself together, old man, and cut it."

"I can't, George," groaned Prescott, raising his hat and tossing the hair back from his forehead; "I can't. You don't know how I love that woman, old fellow. I'd die for her; I'd go out and be shot at once, if it would save her a pang. I hate any one to come near her, and I'm always thinking of her, and longing to be with her."

"I felt just like that once for a female tobacconist in Briggate, at Leeds," said Mr. Pringle after a pause. "Deuced nice girl she was too, and what thundering bad cigars she sold! I'm very glad I didn't die for her, though. I got my appointment just in time, and came up to town without asking her to fly with me to distant climes. She wouldn't have known what 'climes' meant, I

think. Now, look here, Jim; you'd better do something of the same sort. Apply for sick-leave (Glauber will give you a certificate), and go home and have some shooting, and stay with your people, and you'll come back cured. Only cut it at once. Don't go there to-day; come with me. I've got a little business to do that won't take half an hour, and then I'm going to spar with Bob Travers, and you shall see me polish him off with a new 'Mendoza tip' that I learnt last night. Now, you'll come, won't you, Jim?"

"Not to-day, George. I know you're right in every word you say; and yet I can't give it up yet—at all events to-day. I must see her, I've got something special to say to her, and the time's getting on. Good-by, old fellow; I know you mean well; and I'll come out all right yet. God bless you, old boy! Hi! Hansom!" and Mr. Prescott jumped into a cab, murmured an inaudible address to the driver, and was whirled away.

Mr. Pringle remained on the kerb-stone, shaking his head and looking after the departing Han-

som. "James Prescott is in for it," said he to himself, "is decidedly in for it. So, by the way, is George Pringle. If I don't pay Wilkins that twenty pounds to-night, I shall be County-Courted, as safe as houses. I never have put my hand to any bill before; but needs must, I suppose. So I'll just step up and see old Scadgers." And Mr. Pringle struck across the Strand, in a northerly direction.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH THE SECRETARY.

If, instead of ascending the broad staircase immediately on entering the Tin-Tax Office, you were to proceed straight forward, you would come to the messengers' lobby, which is the outpost, protecting the penetralia where the Commissioners and the Secretary are enshrined. The principal duty of these messengers, besides answering bells and carrying about official papers, was to protect the august personages just referred to from being intruded upon by "the public;" and as one learnt from his Scripture History that the term "Gentiles" meant "all nations except the Jews," so, after a very little official experience, one became aware that "the public" meant every body who did not hold an appointment in the Tin-Tax Office. The duties incumbent upon cer-

tain emissaries of the Office, in regard to the collection of revenue, made the head-quarters at Rutland House a grand resort of the "public," who generally came here with very belligerent intentions, and who either referred to printed documents in their hands and wished to see Mr. Simnel the Secretary (whose name appeared attached to the documents), or occasionally even demanded an interview with the Chief Commissioner, the great Sir Hickory Maddox, himself. It is needless to say that these wishes were never gratified: the messengers of the Tin-Tax Office were men to whom, in the discharge of his favourite accomplishment, Ananias could not have held a candle; men with imperturbable faces and ready tongues, who took the "public's" measure in an instant, and sent him to whatsoever clerk they thought would most readily dispose of his grievance. "I wish to see the Chief Commissioner," would exclaim a Briton, red in face, dripping in head, and bursting with indignation. To him calm, majestic Mr. Potts, the chief messenger, a fat man

with a big forehead, a large stomach, flat feet in low shoes, and a general butlerish appearance—"Sir 'Ickry is with the Chancl'r of Schequer, sir, on most important bisness." "The Secretary, then." "The Seckittary have gone with Sir 'Ickry, sir;—what is your bisness, sir?" "Why, I've been overcharged—" "Ah, thought so, sir! Rebate on prop'ty dooty. Walker, show the gentleman to number 15,"—and away down the loud-resounding passages, or up the mountainous stairs, would the unfortunate "public" be hurried.

The superior rooms lay up a little passage to the right of the messengers' lobby, and were three in number. First came the Board-room, a large and solemn salmon-coloured apartment, where the Commissioners sat when for despatch of business assembled. A big, dull-faced clock ticked on the mantelshelf; solemn green maps of distant countries, from year's end to year's end undisturbed, curled themselves round in dusty layers on the walls; and a large red-leather sofa, on which Mr. Beresford, in the absence of the

other Commissioners, and after a hard night's waltzing, had enjoyed hours of pleasant repose, filled up a recess. In the centre of the room stood a heavy writing-table, with pads of blotting-paper, pools of black ink, and bundles of quill-pens distributed at regular intervals. At the head of this table always stood a red-leather arm-chair, and this arm-chair always on business occasions contained the sacred person of the Chief Commissioner, Sir Hickory Maddox. A little man, Sir Hickory, with a parchment face, a blue eye like a bit out of a china plate, stiff gray hair brushed into a point on the top of his head, and formal little gray whiskers: always dressed in a little black frock-coat, and little gray waistcoat and trousers; wearing too a heavy gold-set cornelian seal, and a cumbrous old-fashioned watch-key, just projecting from his fob,—buoys to show whereabouts his thick gold chronometer was sunk, in some unknown depths. A kind-hearted, fussy, hard-working man, whose family had been for generations in the public service, who had himself worked for

years in the Draft and Docket Office, had risen and distinguished himself there, and had finally been rewarded with the Chief-Commissionership of the Tin-Tax, and with being created a K.C.B. His official position he esteemed one of the most enviable in the kingdom; he thought of nothing but official matters; and when, being of a hospitable turn, he had solemn dinners at his house in Wimpole Street, all the guests were magnates of other offices or—for he was a kind chief in that respect—juniors of the Tin-Tax. And invariably, just as the cloth was drawn, the butler would appear at his master's elbow, bearing a salver, on which lay an enormous red-leather official despatch-pouch. The little man would smile feebly at his guests, would shrug his shoulders, and saying, "Our labours follow us even here," would unlock the pouch, glance at its contents (probably the *Globe*, and private note), and relocking it, say, "Lay it on the library-table, Benson. I must go into the matter before I sleep. However, *nunc vino pellite curas!* Port, sherry, madeira, and claret!"

Between Sir Hickory Maddox the senior, and Mr. Beresford the junior, there were two other Commissioners. One was the Honourable Morris Peck, who had been a Gentleman Usher at Court, —at whose name years ago young ladies used to blush, and matrons to gather themselves together in brood-hen fashion for the protection of their chicks,—a roysterer at Crockford's, a friend of Pea-Green Payne and the Golden Hall and that lot,—a "devil of a fellow, sir!" but who was now merely a hook-nosed old gentleman in a high coat-collar and a curly-brimmed hat; wearing false teeth, dyed hair, and blacked eyebrows; who always slept peacefully until his signature was required, when he gave it in a very shaky schoolboy scrawl. The other was Mr. Miles O'Scardon, an Irish gentleman of ancient family but limited means, who had represented Ballyhogue in Parliament for years, and who had obtained his appointment for the fidelity with which he had always obeyed the summons of the ministerial whip. Beyond the Board-room lay the sanctum of the Chief-Commissioner's private se-

cretary, a young man always chosen for his good looks, his good clothes, and his gentlemanly bearing, who was envied by his brother juniors, but who had to answer Sir Hickory's bell, and was consequently taunted by the epithet "Jeames." And beyond that, though unconnected with it, lay the Secretary's room.

A large, light, airy room, far away from the noise and bustle, and looking on to the river. Round the walls are huge oak-presses, filled with tied-up bundles of confidential papers, secret reports of the out-door agents of the Tin-Tax Office, which, if published, would have astonished the world by throwing quite a new light on the incomes of several of its idols. Maps were there too, and framed tables of statistics, and the Stationers' Almanac; and over the mantelpiece hung a proof-before-letters engraving of the portrait of Sir Hickory Maddox, after Grant, with an exact likeness of that great official's favourite inkstand and quill-pen, and with a correctness in the fit of the trousers such as was never achieved by the great original. There was a

round table in the middle of the room, divided into two equal portions by a line of books of reference — Guide-books, M'Culloch's Commercial Dictionary, Haydn's Dates, the Post-Office Directory, Bradshaw, and other light reading: one side of the line of demarcation was bare (save at one o'clock, when it bore the little tray containing the Secretary's light luncheon); on the other lay the Secretary's blotting-book, pen-stand, and paper-case.

About the time when the conversation recorded in the last chapter was going on between his clerks, Mr. Simnel, the Secretary, sat in his official room, signing his name to printed papers, which he took one by one from a large heap at his right hand, and, after signing, dropped at his feet. It was plain that his thoughts were otherwise absorbed; for as the sheets fell from his hand and fluttered to the ground, he never looked after them, but would occasionally pause in his occupation, lay down his pen, nurse his right leg with both hands, and rock himself quietly to and fro. As he moved here and there in the sunlight, you might have perceived

that his limbs were long and ungainly; that he had big broad hands with thick corrugated veins, and finger-nails strong, hard, and cut to a point; that he was very bald, and that such fringe of hair as remained was of a dull red; that he had a large sensual face, big projecting brown eyes, thick clumsy nose, full scarlet underlip, heavy jowl, and large massive chin. You could have noticed, too, that, in certain lights, this face was worn and jaded and almost haggard, traversed here and there with deep furrowed lines, marked with crow's-feet and wrinkles and deep indentations. As you gazed, perhaps, all this faded away, the face beamed forth happy, jolly, sensual as ever; but you felt that the wrinkles were there, and that so soon as the flicker passed away, they would be seen again.

Not in the discharge of his easy labours at the Tin-Tax Office had Mr. Simnel acquired these lines and wrinkles. The calm direction of that engine of the State had only come upon him of late years, and never had caused him any trouble. But Mr. Simnel had compressed a great many years' experience into forty years of life, and the crow's-

feet and indentations were the result of brain-labour, worry, and anxiety. Mr. Simnel's first recollection of any thing found him a little boy, in a skeleton-suit, at the grammar-school of Combcardingham,—a city which every body save the envious inhabitants of its rival Dockborough allowed to be the metropolis of the north. Little Bob Simnel did not know whose son he was, or how his schooling was paid for; all he knew was, that he boarded with an old lady, the widow of a tax-collector, who was very kind to him, and that he soon found out the best thing he could do was to stick to his book. To his book he stuck manfully; walked through all the classes of the grammar-school, one by one, until he became junior boy of the sixth form, until he became senior boy of the sixth form, until the visiting examiner, the Bishop of Latakia, New Zealand, declared that he had the greatest pleasure in naming Mr. Robert Simnel as the gainer of the exhibition of seventy-five pounds a year; and added, as he shook hands with said Robert, that whichever University he might prefer would be honoured by his choice.

Young Mr. Simnel, however, did not go to either Oxford or Cambridge: after a lengthened interview with the head-master, the Rev. Dr. Barker, Mr. Simnel gracefully resigned the exhibition in favour of Swetter, *major*, who "proxime accessit," and entered as the articled clerk of Messrs. Banner and Blair, accounted the sharpest lawyers in Combcardingham, and known through all the county as great electioneering agents for the Liberal party. A few years passed on; Mr. Simnel had finished his articles, had become the junior partner of Messrs. Banner and Blair, and was working steadily and well, when an event happened which insured his success for life.

It was this: Combcardingham, for the three last general elections, had returned the same two members—Sir Thomas Prodd and Mr. Shuttler; both local magnates, employing hundreds of hands, supporting local charities, known throughout the county, and Liberal to the backbone. One morning news sped to London that Mr. Shuttler was dead; and that evening a tall, thin gentleman, with a hare-lip, arrived by afternoon express in

Combcardingham, and engaged the Waterloo Hotel as the head-quarters of Mr. Farquhar, the Conservative candidate. Blue bills on a dead-wall unpleasantly proclaimed this fact to Mr. Simnel as he was shaving himself the next morning; and he perceived that young Woofham, the hope of the Liberal party, would not be brought in without a struggle. So he, metaphorically, took off his coat and set to work; canvassed, intrigued, cajoled, went through all the dirty round of electioneering tactics, but found he did not make much way; found, in truth, that the hare-lipped man seemed to have Fortunatus's purse somewhere about him, and that young Woofham was a miserly young hunks, who did not see the borough as a proper investment for his ingots. What was to be done? To lose the borough would be a tremendous blow to the Government, who had always looked upon it as their own, and to whom it was always supposed to owe allegiance. But the money? The night before the nomination, Mr. Simnel, with his face muffled in a huge handkerchief, despatched the following telegraphic message to Mr. Weal,

the Government whip, at the retrenchment Club: "No. 104 is putting on the steam at Combcardingham. If No. 102 does not do likewise, up goes the sponge." While No. 102 Mall-Pall is the Retrenchment Club, No. 104 is, it is needless to say, the No Surrender (familiarly known as the Wig and Whiskers), the head-quarters of the Conservative party. By the early morning express a messenger, with a letter from Mr. Weal, arrived at Mr. Simnel's office, and during the day the doubts under which many of the electors suffered were satisfactorily explained away, and at the close of the poll Mr. Woofham's name stood well ahead of his rival. Mr. Weal and his party did not forget their telegraphing friend at Combcardingham. After the election was over, Mr. Simnel was summoned to London, had an interview with certain of the *Dii majores*, and at the end of six months was inducted into the Secretaryship of the Tin-Tax Office, then vacant.

They did not like him at first at the Tin-Tax; they thought Bingham ought to have succeeded to the berth; and Bingham—who was a very gouty

old gentleman, who took a great deal of snuff, and swore a great deal, and kept a pocket-dictionary in the right-hand top-drawer of his desk wherewith to correct his orthography—thought so too. But Sir Hickory Maddox, who was not merely very popular, but very much respected by his men, showed such thorough appreciation of Mr. Simnel's talents, and so thoroughly endorsed all the Secretary's acts, that the men began to waver in their allegiance to the Bingham faction; to think that Bingham was little better than an old idiot; that "new blood" in the secretariat might probably not only improve the status of the Tin-Tax Office, but get a new and improved scale for the clerks; and when they found that, after a couple of years, the new Secretary actually did accomplish this feat, the new Secretary was popular for ever. Popular officially, not privately. The juniors at the Tin-Tax had been in the habit of chaffing their late lamented secretary; of bribing him, by gifts of game and hothouse fruits, to grant them odd days and even weeks of leave of absence; of chatting with him familiarly on current events. Mr.

Simnel's manners effectually checked all that kind of thing. With the Commissioners he might unbend; with the juniors he was adamant. But if he met one of his men in society, in the Opera lobby, or at a Botanical Fête, he would make a point of shaking hands with him as though they hadn't seen each other for ages, and of talking with him of every subject possible—except the Tin-Tax Office.

The pile of papers for signature had melted to one solitary document, the floor was strewn with the evidences of Mr. Simnel's handiwork, and Mr. Simnel himself sat nursing his leg and swaying himself gently to and fro in meditation. Occasionally he would pass his disengaged hand through his fringe of hair, and smile quietly to himself, then make a few figures on his blotting-pad, add them, and set-to rocking again. In the midst of this occupation he heard his door open, and looking up, saw Mr. Beresford.

"Why, what the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed, in surprise. "I though you were on Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up unlimited gold

and silver, wooing heiresses, and settling a Belgravian ménage; and you turn up in this dingy old barrack. Is it all over?—has the lady succumbed? and do you want me to help you to choose fire-irons and window-curtains?"

Mr. Beresford did not reply for a minute; then he said, shortly and decisively, "I've been sold!"

Mr. Simnel gave one short, loud whistle, and said interrogatively, "Wouldn't?"

Mr. Beresford, seating himself on the edge of the table, looked up at Mr. Simnel, who had taken up his position on the rug, with his back to the empty fire-place, and said, "No chance; booked beforehand!"

Whereupon Mr. Simnel gave a louder whistle, and said, "Tell!"

"You know how I stand, Simnel, well enough," said Mr. Beresford; "and this looked a very safe *coup*, I thought, specially after I got your telegram. There were two or three fellows staying down at Bissett who I thought were on, too. Man named Lyster; do you know him?—

tall man, dark beard, yaw-haw beast, from Indian army."

"I know him!" was all Mr. Simnel's reply to this flattering sketch.

"And another man, newspaper man, belongs to the 'Retrenchment' and the 'Fly-by-night;' Churchill, you know."

"*I* know Churchill. Was he going in for an heiress?"

"No, not exactly; at least I thought so, but it turned out not. But I didn't like these fellows hanging about; specially Lyster—romantic party, sigh and that sort of business. So, when I found from you it was all right, I made up my mind to see where I was."

"Well; and Miss Townshend wouldn't have it?"

"Not at all! We were sitting after dinner, when the women had gone to the drawing-room, the very day I got your telegram, and old Wentworth told us there was a man coming down the next day,—Schrötter, or Schröder, a German merchant in Mincing Lane—"

"I know him," interrupted Simnel: "Gustav Schröder; elderly man. What took him to Bissett?"

"Love, sir—love! he's engaged to be married to Miss Townshend!"

"Whew!" said Mr. Simnel, with his longest and shrillest whistle. "The deuce he is! That *is* news! How does the young lady like it?"

"Well, not much. She couldn't, of course, be expected to feel very enthusiastic about a short, stout, gray-headed German, who talks the most infernal jargon, and hasn't got a sound tooth in his head. Took him out shooting once, but he made the most awful mess of it; devilish near shot the beaters, and sprained his ankle leaping a half-foot ditch. The girl seemed horribly ashamed of him, and of his clumsy compliments and elephantine gambols; but she's evidently booked—her father takes care of that."

"Ah, ha!" said Mr. Simnel, nursing his knee, rocking himself to and fro, and rapidly going off into an absent fit; "ah, ha!"

"I hate to hear you say 'ah, ha,' Simnel!"

said Mr. Beresford, with some asperity. "You're always up to some plottings and plans when you utter those seemingly benevolent grunts. I suppose you suspect old Townshend of some grand *diablerie* in this affair. I never could make out what it is that you know about that old gentleman."

"Know about him?" said Simnel, rousing himself with a laugh; "that he gives capital dinners and has plenty of money; that he's about to marry his daughter to one of the richest men in the City. What more need one know about a man? I don't know what church he goes to, or what peculiar shade of religion he affects; whether he's a good father or a bad one; whether he rules his daughter or is ruled by her. But I *do* know that he drinks Tod-Heatly's champagne, and banks at the London and Westminster. This news looks fishy for your business, Beresford!"

"Simply a case of stump," said Mr. Beresford, rising from the table, plunging his hands into his trousers-pockets, and striding up and down the room.

"What do you mean to do?"

"Borrow two hundred pounds more of you," exclaimed Beresford, stopping short on the edge of the rug and confronting Mr. Simnel.

"And then?" asked the latter gentleman, smiling calmly.

"God knows!" said Beresford, with something like a shudder. "Something must turn up; the Bishop must die or Lady Lowndes, and there'd be a safe something from them; or there'll be some girl—"

"Ye-es," interrupted Mr. Simnel drily, seating himself at his desk, and unlocking a draw therein. "You're the most marvellously sanguine fellow, perfectly Micawber-ish in your notions of something turning up, and your making a *coup*. But —suppose t'other! suppose it didn't come off! Now you owe me,"—looking at a paper which he took from the drawer,—"six hundred pounds already, and I've only got insurance-policies for security."

"You get your interest," growled Beresford.

"A mild six," said Mr. Simnel, with a shrug

of his shoulders and his pleasant smile. "A mild six; just what I should get in Bombay Preference, or Great Luxembourg Centrals, or a dozen other safe investments. However, you shall have this two hundred; but I should be glad to see your way in the future. Is there no girl with money whom you think you could propose to speedily?"

"Not one," said Beresford, stopping in his walk and reseating himself on the table. "Oh, by Jove, I forgot to tell you that."

"What?"

"About Kate Mellon,—tremendous scene just before I left;" and Mr. Beresford proceeded to recount the dialogue between him and Kate Mellon, which was recorded in the fourth chapter of this story. He told the tale honestly throughout, and when he had finished he looked up in Mr. Simnel's face and said, "Deuced awkward position, wasn't it?"

Mr. Simnel had not lost one word of the story; on the contrary, he had listened to it with the greatest eagerness and interest, but he did not answer Mr. Beresford's final query. He had

fallen into his old leg-nursing attitude, and was rocking himself silently to and fro.

"Devilish unpleasant, wasn't it?" reiterated Mr. Beresford.

"Eh!" said Mr. Simnel in a loud high key. "Yes, most unpleasant, of course. We'll talk more about that; but you must be off now. To-day's only half a day, you know; and I've got all sorts of things to do before I go. You shall have that two hundred on Monday, all right. Good-by! see you on Monday;" and the Secretary shook hands with the Commissioner until the latter was fairly outside the door.

Then Mr. Simnel returned to his desk, and took up his leg again.

"It seems to be coming on, now," he said to himself, "and all together too. The old man always meant little Alice for a Duke, and now to let her go to such carrion as old Schröder; that looks like smash. He holds heavily in Pernambucos, in Cotopaxis, and other stuff that's run down like water lately; and he must have dropped at least ten thousand in that blessed Bird-in-the-

Hand insurance. I think the time has come to put the screw on, and I don't think"—turning to a drawer and taking from an envelope a paper yellow with age—"that he'll dishonour this. What an awful time ago it seems! There,"—replacing the paper,—"go back till you're wanted. You've kept so long that—Ah, by Jove! the other business! To be married, eh? To be married, Kate?" releasing his leg and plucking at his lips. "To be married to Master Charley Beresford! not while I live, my child! not while I live, and have power to turn a screw on in your direction too!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE MR. PRINGLE WENT TO.

It has been notified in a previous chapter that Mr. Pringle was in some mental anxiety touching the acquisition of a certain twenty pounds which he required for immediate disbursement. This position he held in common with many of his colleagues at the Tin-Tax Office, and indeed with most junior clerks in the Civil Service. "The truth is," says Captain Smoke, in Douglas Jerrold's comedy, *The Bubbles of the Day*, "I want a thousand pounds." "My dear Smoke," says his friend, "there never was a man yet that did *not* want a thousand pounds." The truth of the axiom is undeniable; only in the Civil Service the amount is much diminished. Twenty pounds, familiarly known as a "twentyer," is generally the much-desiderated sum among the junior slaves of the Crown; and it

was for a "twentyer" that Mr. Pringle now pined. A hosier who some two years before had sued for Mr. Pringle's custom, nor sued in vain,—who had supplied him with under-linen of fine texture and high price, with shirts of brilliant and variegated patterns, with boating jerseys and socks so vivid in stripe that his legs resembled those of the functionary in the opening of the pantomime who by the boys in the gallery is prematurely recognised as the future clown, owing to the resplendent beauty of his ankles,—at length, after repeated transmissions of his "little account," and after mystic hints that he had not yet seen the colour of Mr. Pringle's money, brought into action the terrible engines of the law, and summoned his debtor to the County Court.

It was at the very latter end of the quarter when this legal ukase was placed in Mr. Pringle's hands, and that gentleman, examining his capital, found it consist of thirty-seven shillings, a silver threepence, and a penny,—which sums were to provide his dinners, cigars, and general pleasures for a fortnight. Clearly, then, out of this no com-

promise could be effected; he could not even go through that performance so dear to the hard-pressed debtor, which is temporarily so soothing and in the end so futile, known as paying "something on account." A five-pound note has the same effect on a tradesman to whom twenty pounds are owing as a wet brush on a very bad hat,—it creates a temporary gleam of comfort, *but nothing more.* Mr. Pringle had not even this resource: if he were summoned to the County Court, and if the investigation were reported, as it was sure to be, in *The Dalston Dreadnought and De Beauvoir Town Looker-on*, he should get horribly chaffed by his comrades, perhaps pitched into by the Board, and it would bring all his other creditors down on him. So something must be done, and cash must be raised at once. Mr. Pringle did not know where to turn: he had never been a borrower, and hated the idea of asking money-favours from his friends; moreover, in real truth, he would not have known whom to turn to, had he been so minded. Prescott, his Pylades, was by no means overburdened with money—indeed, Mr. Pringle had reason to

believe, was himself pressed by creditors; Kinchenton's income only sufficed for the keeping up of his modest establishment and for the schooling of Percy; while Dibb, Crump, Boppy, or any of the other office men, were utterly impracticable in such a case. Finally, he determined that he must "do a bill;" an act of which he had hitherto been innocent, and towards the proper accomplishment of which he thought it best to take the advice of Mr. Rittman.

In nearly every Government office there is one impecunious black sheep,—one clerk who is always hovering on the edge of the precipice of insolvency, over which he finally tumbles, to creep out with life indeed, but with scars and bruises which last him during the remainder of his official existence. This character was in the Tin-Tax Office played by Mr. Rittman, who for years had been "in difficulties," and was thoroughly versed in every species of money-borrowing, were it the loan-simple from a friend, the loan-complex on a bill with a friend's name, the life-insurance facile, the loan-office ruinous, the bill-of-sale advertised,

or the pawnbroker low. As yet no learned Commissioner had sat in judgment on Mr. Rittman's pecuniary transactions, but he had been in sponging-houses, in Whitecross Street, and in the Queen's Bench; and though his end was rapidly approaching (for he had a couple of sons verging on manhood, and apparently inheriting all their father's frailties), he was never despondent, but maintained a creditable appearance and a cheerful manner. To him Mr. Pringle had gone, on the day before that on which we first made his acquaintance; and Mr. Rittman, from the young man's manner on entering the room, at once guessed the object of his visit.

"How do, Rittman?" commenced Mr. Pringle.

"Good morning, my dear sir—good morning!" said the gentleman addressed, laying down his pen and bowing pleasantly. He had on a voluminous white waistcoat, a great show of shirt-wristband, and before him, in a tumbler, stood some choice flowers. "Seldom you come down to this part of the building; keep to the more

aristocratic end—eh?" and Mr. Rittman smiled, and showed a good set of teeth.

"No! I don't know—the truth is—I want some advice, and I think you're the man to give it to me."

"My dear sir, I shall be delighted. What is it?" (this thrown off at a tangent to a messenger who appeared in the doorway, saying, "Ere's Brown's man agen, Mr. Rittman"). "Ah! Brown's man; well, you'd better say I've not yet returned from Jersey, but you expect me on Tuesday.—And now, my dear sir; you were saying—some advice?"

"Well, the fact is, Rittman, I'm hard up, and I want to borrow some money; and I thought you could—"

"Not lend you any? that would be almost too delicious, my dear sir. You didn't think I could lend you any?" and Mr. Rittman screamed with laughter at the absurdity of the idea.

"No, no, of course not; but I thought you might tell me where I could get it."

"Oh, that's a totally different thing; of course

I can. I rather pique myself upon knowing more about such matters than most men. Of course I can. Now, let me see—what security can you give?"

"Eh?" asked Mr. Pringle.

"Security for the repayment? If you borrow from the Rainy Day or Amicable Nest-Eggs Insurance Office, you must give two sureties, householders, and insure for double the amount of the loan. If you go to the Helping Hand or the Leg-up Loan Office, you must give three sureties, householders, and pay a lot for office-fees and inquiries, which are made by a dirty-faced man at a pound a week. If you give a bill of sale on your furniture—"

"My good sir," said Pringle testily, "I've got no furniture. And surely all this bother can't be necessary for the sum I want—only twenty pounds."

"Twenty pounds! twenty pounds! a fleabite, a mere fleabite!" said Mr. Rittman (he had three and sevenpence in his pocket at the moment, and did not know in the least where to turn for

more). "I hoped you were going to call my generalship into play; for I may say, without boasting, that when it's not for myself, I am fertile in resources. But—twenty pounds—I'll give you the address of a man who'll let you have it at once."

"There won't be any names wanted, or anything of that sort, will there?" asked Pringle, rather doubtful of this promptitude.

"Nothing of the kind; merely your acknowledgment. Here's the address—Scadgers, Newman Street. You'll find Mr. Scadgers a curious man, but very pleasant; and when you say you come from me, he'll be very polite. And, Mr. Pringle, let me give you one word of advice—Be firm in the matter of Madeira."

"In the matter of Madeira?"

"Yes, awful; you can't stand it. Ostades are bad enough, or a Stradivarius fiddle; and perhaps, as you're a single man in apartments, a key-bugle mightn't do, as likely to be objected to by the other lodgers—but any of them rather than the Madeira."

In the middle of Newman Street stands a paintless door, in the centre of which gleams a brass-plate, bearing the word "Scadgers," in fat Roman capitals. Nothing else. No "Mr.;" no description of Scadgers' profession; nothing to break the charm. "Scadgers" stands an oasis of shining brass in a desert of lustreless deal, and winks knowingly at the double-faced portrait, one half dirty, the other half clean, at the picture-restorer's over the way. Scadgers' door differed from its fellows in having but one bell-handle; for Scadgers' had quite enough business to occupy the whole house, and to demand ramifications in the neighbourhood. All we have to do, in the course of this story, is to deal with Scadgers as Scadgers; but my private belief is, that Scadgers was the Universal Philanthropic Man's a Man for a' that Loan Office, held at the Blue Pig and Toothache in Wells Street; that he was "Cash promptly advanced on furniture without removal, freehold and leasehold property, legacies, reversions, warrants, and all other securities. Sheriffs' executions and rent-distraint immediately paid out" (*vide* advertise-

ment);—that he was "Methuselah's Muffin-Powder, or Never say Die" patent medicine, and proprietor-in-chief of "The Hob," a domestic Miscellany, which commenced with weak romance, and failed, but has since achieved an enormous success for itself, and a fortune for its spirited proprietor, by the publication of "Baby Clarence; or, My Life at Brompton." Certainly you could not have guessed Scadgers' occupation from the outside of his residence, which looked like a dirty lodging-house, like a third-rate boarding-house, like those melancholy houses occupied by those most melancholy people on earth, third-rate piano-sellers; like a house let in rooms to people who lithograph fashion-plates; like any thing but what it was—a house where more money was made than in nine-tenths of the houses in London.

When Mr. Pringle arrived on the Scadgerian steps, he looked for a knocker, and finding none, he pulled the Scadgerian bell. A responsive click and the partial unlatching of the door invited him to push; the door yielded, and he found himself in a large and empty hall, on one side of which was a

glass-door, with the word "Office" in faded gilt letters on a white ground. This glass-door being open, Mr. Pringle walked straight through, and found himself in the "office." He had seen a good many offices in his time, but never one like this. He had never seen an office with musical instruments in it before; and here were four or five pianos standing ranged against the wall, to say nothing of harps in leather cases leaning drunkenly in corners, and a few cornets-à-piston in green boxes, and a harp or two with blue ribbons to hang them round your neck by, just as if they had come fresh from the necks of Spanish *donnas*. And there were slack-baked-looking old pictures in heavy Dutch-metal frames—fine specimens of old masters—saints with skulls and Bibles in front of them, and very ascetic cheek-bones and great phrenological development of talent and courage; Dutch boors standing on one leg and drinking glasses of ale, and yawning youths with an effect of shaded candle-light on their faces. There were modern pictures, too, of lakes and Thames scenery, and girls with fair hair, which, when compared

with the old ones, looked as if they had been painted in milk-and-water; and there were three driving-whips in one corner, a set of harness across a chair, and the leather cushions of a brougham under it. There was a bronze umbrella-stand formed by a dog holding a whip in his mouth, a big French clock, and a couple of chemist's bottles, red and green; and in the midst of all this confusion stood a little shrivelled old man, with very white hair and a very red face—a dirty little old man dressed in a rusty suit of black, who addressed Mr. Pringle in a rusty creaking voice, and wanted to know "his pleasure."

"I—I wish to speak to Mr. Scadgers," said Mr. Pringle, with a modesty and hesitation altogether strange to him.

"Ah!" said the little old man; "deary me! yes!" and then he seated himself on the edge of a wine-hamper, and began to count his fingers with great interest, as though not quite sure of the number he really possessed.

"Mr. Scadgers!" said Pringle after a minute or two.

"Ah, yes! I'll call him," said the little old man, and rang a bell which lurked in the corner of the chimney-piece.

A great creaking of uncarpeted stairs under heavy boots followed this bell-ringing, and presently Mr. Scadgers entered the room. Mr. Scadgers' appearance partook of the charming amenities of the prize-fighter and the undertaker: his hair was black and close-cropped, his face white, his nose red, one eye was considerably larger than the other, and one corner of his mouth had a peculiar upward twist. He was dressed in black, with a pair of dull leather boots reaching half-way up his thighs; and as he came through the door, he took a red silk pocket-handkerchief from the crown of his hat, and mopped his head.

"Servant, sir!" said Mr. Scadgers, surveying Mr. Pringle with his gleaming black eyes, and reckoning him up in a moment. "What may you want?"

"Well," said Mr. Pringle, "I wanted a few minutes' conversation; but private, if you please—"

"Oh!" interrupted Mr. Scadgers, "don't mind

Jinks; he's safe enough—knows all my affairs—thoroughly to be trusted."

"Well, then," said Mr. Pringle, hesitating; then, with a desperate rush, "look here!—fact is—want money!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Scadgers, with something like admiration in his tone, "got it out with a rush, didn't you? That's the only way! Who told you to come to me?"

"Mr. Rittman, of the—"

"I know—Tin-Tax Office. Do you belong to it? Thought so. Wretched office; lost a mint of money in that office. What salary do you get?"

Mr. Pringle mentioned that he was in the receipt of ninety pounds a-year.

"Ah! twenty-one eighteen and nine on the 5th of every third month—I know all about it! Now," mopping his head, "how much do you want?"

"Twenty pounds."

"Lor' bless me! and when do you want it?"

"At once!"

"Can't be done, sir! can't be done!" Violent

mopping. "Haven't got any money in the house. Can't you look in next week, and I might let you have ten?"

Mr. Pringle roundly asserted that this would not do at all, and turned round towards the door.

"Stop, sir!" shouted Mr. Scadgers, making tremendous play with the red-silk handkerchief. "What a hasty young man you are! Look here,"—taking out his purse,—"here's a ten-pound note that I promised to young Stephens of the Wafer Office; he was to have been here by two—now its getting on for three, and he's not come. I might let you have that!"

"But that's only ten!" said Mr. Pringle.

"*Only* ten! what a way to speak of money! Wait, sir—wait; let us see what we can do. Any one likely to look in this afternoon to pay any interest, Jinks?"

"Too late now!" said Jinks, with brevity.

"Ah! too late—I dessay! Just look in the cash-box, Jinks, and see what's there; though I'm afraid it's not much. I should say there wasn't more than three pounds, Jinks!"

Mr. Jinks peered into a little cash-box on the desk before him, and answered, "Just three pound!"

"Ah! bring 'em out, Jinks; give 'em here. Let's see—ten and three's thirteen; and that only leaves me seven-and-six to go on with till Monday! Never mind: you could have thirteen, Mr.—"

"But I want twenty!"

"Ah, so you do! Pity you don't want some wine! I've got some Madeiry as would—but wine ain't money, is it? There's a splendid picture, now,—a Murillo: you might take that."

"Pictures are not more money than wine; are they?"

"Ain't they? That Murillo's worth ten pound, and any one would give you that for it. Ain't there no one you could sell it to? You see you're in such a hurry for the money, or you might offer it to the National Gallery, or some swell collecting of pictures might buy it, but you're so pressed. Tell you what you might do, though," said Mr. Scadgers, as though struck

by a sudden inspiration: "you might pawn it."

"How the deuce could I go lugging that picture about the streets to pawn it?" said Pringle testily.

"No, to be sure! Stay, look here! I dare say Jinks wouldn't mind pawning it for you. Jinks, look here; just run with this round the corner, will you? Get as much as you can, you know." And without more ado Mr. Jinks put on a reddish-black napless hat, tucked the picture under his arm, and started off.

While he was gone Mr. Scadgers asked Mr. Pringle what his name was, how long he had been in the office, where he lodged, and other home-thrusting questions; and presently Mr. Jinks returned without the picture, but with three sovereigns and a printed ticket, which he delivered to his master, saying, "Wouldn't do no more than three."

"Three!" said Mr. Scadgers. "Well, that's nearer to twenty than we was, isn't it? Now, Mr. Pringle,"—taking a slip of stamped paper

from his pocket-book—"just you sign your name at the bottom here. All correct, you see. Fifth of next month,—promise to pay,—value received, —and all the rest of it; and I'll hand you over sixteen pounds and the ticket; and when you get that picture out, you'll have a treasure."

"Oh, curse the picture!" said Pringle ruefully.

"Ah," said Mr. Scadgers, grinning, "that's what they all says. Cuss the picture! Well, if that ticket ain't any use to you, I don't mind giving you half a pound for it."

"I thought you had only seven-and-sixpence left?"

"No more I have, myself; but I might borrow half a pound from Jinks. What do you say? Ah, I thought so. Here, Jinks, put this little dockyment along with your other valuables. Here's the half-pound, sir. Now let's look at your signature. George Townshend Pringle! Very nice. No relation to Mr. Townshend of Austin Friars—the great Townshend?"

"He's my uncle," said Pringle. "I'm named after him."

"Indeed! named after him! A very capital connexion. Good morning, sir! good morning! I'll look in upon you on the fifth."

But after Mr. Pringle had gone Mr. Scadgers still stood with the bill fluttering between his fingers, muttering to himself: "Sing'ler that! very sing'ler! For years I hadn't seen the Runner until yesterday, when I came across him in Cheapside; and now to-day I hear of him again. I wonder," added Mr. Scadgers, with a very sinister smile, "whether that little account between me and the Runner will ever be wound up? I've owed him one this many a year."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. PRESCOTT'S PROCEEDINGS.

The Hansom cab conveying Mr. Prescott went at a rapid pace along the Strand, through the Pall-Mall district, and by divers short cuts into Piccadilly. There was nothing to stop it; there were no blocks or stoppages; and as it was the dead season of the year, and every one was out of town, the Commissioners of Sewers were good enough to leave the roads alone; reserving until the traffic was in full play their right to erect gigantic, hideous hoardings in the most crowded thoroughfares. The streets were deserted, the public buildings shut up, dust and straw and dirty paper whirled about in the eddying gusts of the autumnal wind, and the entire appearance of London was dull and wretched. People had evidently been in doubt what to do about dress;

and while some were in the faded gaiety of the just-departed summer, others were putting on an even shadier appearance in the creased and awkward garments of the previous winter. The doctors' carriages and the hack-cabs had the thoroughfares to themselves; the occupants of the former, always on the watch for the recognition of some favoured patient, sat back in their vehicles, engaged either in the perusal of some medical work, or in happy day-dreams of increased practice, studs of wearied horses, noble introductions, enormous fees,—all culminating, perhaps, in baronetcies and appointments at Court.

Of the hack-cabs seen about, but few were Hansoms; for at that season men who want to go quickly, and don't mind paying a shilling a mile, are at a discount. Now and then a sun-tanned swell, whose portmanteau atop nearly obstructed the driver's sight, and who himself was but dimly visible among gun-cases, hat-boxes, and railway-rugs, might have been encountered, passing from one terminus to another; but the "reg'lar riders,"

—the lawyer's clerk, with the tape-tied bundle of papers, who charges his cab to "the office;" the lounging swell; the M.P. dashing down to the House; the smug-faced capitalist, whose brain is full of calculation, and who sits the whole way to the City smiling at all and seeing none; the impecunious speculator, who rides in a cab because he cannot afford to be seen in an omnibus,—all these were away from London. And the four-wheelers, though laden, had but dreary burdens: the fortnight at Margate is over; no more morning dips, no more afternoon rambles on the sands, no donkey-backs, no pleasure-boats, no Pegwell Bay now! Paterfamilias is once more Hobbs and Motchkin's out-door at thirty shillings a week; the eight-roomed house in Navarino Terrace, Camden Town, resumes its wonted appearance; the children return to the "curriculum" of education at Miss Gimp's in the Crescent; and save the sand-covered little wooden spades, which hang from the hat-pegs in the passage, naught remains of their maritime excursion.

Dreary, dreary, every where! Dreary down

in old country mansions, where, while the men are pheasant-shooting in the woods, the ladies look dismally on what was lately the croquét-ground, where the gardeners are now busy sweeping up the leaves and pressing them into huge barrows and wheeling them away; where the trees stand out gaunt and brown, and where the evergreens bordering the pleasant walks rustle with the autumnal winds; where the cracks and flaws and dampnesses of old country mansions begin to make themselves unpleasantly conspicuous; and where the servants, town-bred, commence to be colded, sniffy, to have shivers and "creeps." Dreary at the sea-side, where the storm-soaked, worm-eaten jetty lately echoing to the pattering feet of children, or the sturdy tread of the visitor taking his constitutional, is now given over to its normal frequenters—tarry-trousered men in blue jerseys and oil-skin sou'-wester hats, who are always looking out for some boat that never arrives, or some storm which always comes when they do not expect it; bills are stuck on the pleasant plate-glass bow-windows so lately filled with pretty

girls, rosy children, and parents who dined at two o'clock, and enjoyed their nuts and port-wine "looking over the sea;" and the proprietors of the lodging-houses, who have lived in damp back-kitchens since June, are once more seen above-ground. Dreary in Continental towns, where home-returning English are finding out that they have spent too much money on their trip, and bewailing the Napoleons left as a tribute to the managers of the Homburg Bank; where the discomforts of the return sea-passage first assert themselves, and where couriers and innkeepers are going in for their last grand turn of robbery and swindle. Dreary, dreary, every where! but specially dreary in Hyde Park, at the Piccadilly gates, at which Mr. Prescott leaves his Hansom, and strolls into Rotten Row.

A blank desert of posts and rails and dry dusty gravel; a long strip of iron-enclosed sand and grit, with half a dozen figures in the three-quarter mile range to break the dull monotony. As Prescott mooned drearily along, at five-minute intervals he would hear the sound of a horse's hoofs, and turn-

ing rapidly, would find some easy-going steed doing its quiet sanitary business for its owner, a man who, either from circumstances or disposition, never quitted London, but was to be seen at some time or other of the day in the Row, no matter what might be the time of year. Interspersed with these were grooms, riding in that groomy undress of wideawake hat, short, stiff shirt-collar, and tight-fitting, yellow-clay-coloured trousers, trying the wind and bottom of some that were meant to be flyers in the approaching hunting-season; beasts with heavy, strong quarters, long backs, short, sharp heads, and rolling eyes, with a preponderance of white always showing. Country-bred is Mr. Prescott, and cannot therefore divest himself of a certain canniness in the matter of horseflesh: now and then he leans over the rail to follow the progress of a horseman flying past, with his hands well down and every muscle of his steed brought into splendid play; or the healthy gymnastics of a valetudinarian, who had learned exactly the utmost amount of exercise to be derived from his horse as compared with the least amount

of discomfort to be endured by himself. But these do not rivet his attention; and he passes on until he is nearly abreast of the Serpentine, when, looking back, he sees a blue skirt fluttering in the wind, and in an instant recognising its wearer, pulls up by the rails and waits her advent.

It does not take long for that chestnut mare to cover the distance, albeit she is being ridden from side to side, and is evidently receiving her "finishing" in the elegancies of the *manège*. In less than two minutes she is pulled up short by the rails where Prescott is standing, and her rider, Kate Mellon, with the colour flushing in her cheeks, with her eyes aglow, with her hair a trifle dishevelled from the exercise, is sitting bolt upright, and with the handle of her riding-whip giving the young gentleman a mock salute.

"Servant, colonel!" says she.

"How do you do, Kate?" says Prescott, leaning forward and touching the neat little white cuff on her wrist; "I thought I should find you here."

"More than I thought of you!" says the lady. "Why ain't you counting up those figures, and

adding and subtracting, and all the rest of it you do in your office, eh?"

"To-day's a half-holiday, Kitty—Saturday, you know," says Prescott, with rather a grim smile; for he does not like that rough description of his official duties.

"Oh, ah!" says the lady, with great simplicity; "Saturday, ah! Confounded nuisance sometimes! Lost my net veil one Saturday afternoon here in the Row; went to Marshall and Snelgrove's on my way home; all shut up tight as wax!"

"You're better than you were yesterday, at the station?"

"Oh, yes; I'm all right; I shall do well enough! Wo-ho! steady, old lady!" (this to the mare). "I'm always better in town. Don't let's stand here; I can't hold this mare quiet, and that's the truth; she frets on the curb most awful."

"Most awfully, Kitty, not most awful. I've told you of that a hundred times."

"Well, most awfully, if you like it better. Steady, Poll! Walk along by my side. Who are you, I should like to know, to pull me up

about my talking? What right have you to lecture me about my grammar and that?"

"What right?" asks Prescott, suddenly turning white; "none, save the fact of my loving you, Kitty. You know it well enough, though I've never told you in so many words. You know that I *do* love you! You can't have seen me hanging about you during the last season, making excuses to come to your place, first there and last to go, hating every man who had more chances of talking to you than I had,—you can't have seen all this without knowing that I loved you, Kitty!"

The mare is pulled suddenly up; there is no one near them in the blank desert of the Row; and her rider says, "And suppose I *did* know it,—what then?"

Prescott shrugs his shoulders and looks upon the ground, but does not reply.

"Have you ever had one word of encouragement from me? Have you ever seen a look of mine which has led you on? Can you say that, suppose I tell you to let me hear no more of this,—as I do tell you at once and for ever,—I have

deceived or thrown you over in any one way?"

"Never!"

"Thank God for that!" says the girl, with some bitterness; "for that's a chalk in my favour, at least. Now look here! I know you, James Prescott; and I know that you're too good a man —too well brought up and fond of home and that sort of thing—to hint any thing but what's right towards me."

"Kitty!"

"There—I know it. Don't break a blood-vessel with your emotion," she added, gently tapping him on the shoulder with her riding-whip. "All right. Well, suppose we were married, you'd feel very jolly, wouldn't you, while you were down at your office doing your sums and things, which you got so riled when I spoke of just now, to think that Tom Orme, and Claverhouse, and De Bonnet, and a whole lot of fellows, were mooning about this place with me?"

"I'd wring all their necks!" says honest Jim Prescott, looking excessively wobegone.

"Exactly. But you see, if you wrung their necks, they would not send their wives and sisters and daughters to be taught riding at The Den; they would not commission me to look out for ladies' hacks, to break them, and bring them into order; and my trade would be gone. And we couldn't live on the twopence-half-penny a-year you get from your office, Jim, old fellow."

"I know that, Kitty," said poor Prescott; "I know all that; but—"

"Hold on half a second!" interrupted Kate; "let us look the thing straight in the face, and have it out, Jim, now and for ever. I know you—know you're a thoroughgoing good fellow, straight as an arrow, and know that if you married me, you'd stick to me till you dropped. But you'd have a hard time, Jim—an awful hard time!"

"I should not mind that, Kitty. I'd work for you—"

"Oh, it isn't in that way I mean. But how would you stand having to break off with your own

people for your wife's sake? How could you take me down to your governor's parsonage, and introduce me there? How would my manners and my talk please your mother and sisters? It's madness, Jim,—it's worse than madness,—to talk of such a scheme. Shake hands, and let's be always good friends—the best of friends. If you ever want a good turn that I can do, you know where I'm to be found. God bless you, old boy; but never mention this subject again!"

James Prescott gave a great gulp at a lump which was rising in his throat, and warmly grasped Kate Mellon's proffered hand. As she raised her eyes he noticed her colour fade, and saw a troubled expression in her face.

"Good by, Jim," she said hurriedly. "Just strike down that path, will you? Get away quickly; here's some one coming; and—and I don't want to be seen talking to you. Quick! there's a good fellow. Good by."

She touched her horse with her slight whip, and cantered off at once. Prescott looked in the direction she had indicated, and saw Mr. Simnel,

mounted on a handsome thoroughbred, calmly curveting up the Row.

What could there be between Kate Mellon and Robert Simnel?

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS LEXDEN ON MATRIMONY.

After that episode at the stile, which, as it happened, formed such a crisis in their destinies, Barbara Lexden and Frank Churchill did not move towards the house, but quietly turned into that fir plantation through which they had strolled some days previously on their return from the shooting party. At first neither spoke; Barbara walked with her eyes downcast, and Churchill strolled idly by her side; then, after a few paces, he took her unresisting hand and placed it in his arm. She looked up into his face with calm, earnest, trustful eyes, and he bowed his head until, for the first time in his life, his lips touched hers, and as he withdrew them he murmured, "My darling! my own darling! thank God for this!" His arm stole round her waist, and for an instant

he held her tightly clasped; then gently releasing her, he again passed her hand through his arm, covered it with his other hand, and walked on quietly by her side. There was no need of speech; it was all known, all settled, all arranged; that restored glove, that one fervent sentence, that one look in which each seemed to read the secrets of the other's soul, had done it all. This was first love, undisturbed by the fact that on either side there had probably been some half-dozen attacks of that spurious article, that saccharine bliss, that state of pleasant torture which reveals itself in sheep-like glances and deep-drawn sighs, in a tendency to wear tight boots and to increase the already over-swollen tailor's bill, to groan and be poetical, and to shrink from butchers' meat. Although the existent state of Barbara and Churchill had none of these characteristics, it was still first love.

Marvellous, marvellous time! so short in its duration, but leaving such an indelible impress on the memory! A charmed period, a *hasheesh*-dream impossible ever to be renewed, a prolonged

intoxication scarcely capable of realisation in one's sober moments. A thing of once, which gone never comes again, but leaves behind it remembrances which, while they cause the lips to curl at their past folly, yet give the heart a twinge in the reflection that the earnestness which outbalanced the folly, the power of entering into and being swayed by them, the youth—that is it, after all; confess it!—the youth is vanished for ever and aye. What and where was the glamour, the power of which you dimly remember but cannot recall? Put aside the claret-jug, and, with your feet on the fender, as you sit alone, try and analyse that bygone time. The form comes clearly out of the mist: the dark-brown banded hair, the quiet earnest eyes, the slight lissome figure and delicate hands; and with them a floating reminiscence of a violet perfume, a subtle, delicate essence, which made your heart beat with extra vigour even before your eyes rested on what they longed for. Kisses and hand-clasps and ardent glances were the current coin of those days; one of either of the former missed, say at parting for

the night, for instance, made you wretched; one of the latter shot in a different direction sent you to toss sleepless all night on your bed, and to rise with the face of a murderer, and with something not very different from the mind of one. There were heartaches in those days, real dead, dull pains, sickening longings, spasms of hope and fear; dim dread of missing the prize on the attainment of which the whole of life was set; a psychical state which would be as impossible to your mind now as would the early infantile freshness to your lined cheek, or the curling locks of boyhood to your grizzled pate. It is gone, clean gone. Perhaps it snapped off short with a wrench, leaving its victim with a gaping wound which the searing-iron of time has completely cicatrised; perhaps it mellowed down into calm, peaceful, conjugal, and subsequently paternal affection. But tell me not, O hard-hearted and worldly-minded bachelor, intent on the sublimation of self, and cynically enough disposed to all that is innocent and tender, —tell me not, O husband, however devoted to your wife, however proud of your offspring,—tell me

not that a regret for that vanished time does not sometimes cross your mind, that the sense of having lost the power of enjoying such twopenny happiness, ay, and such petty misery, does not cost you an occasional pang. It still goes on, that tragi-comedy, the same as ever, though the actors be different, though our places are now in the cushioned gallery among the spectators instead of on the stage, and we witness the performance, not with envy, not with admiration, but with a strange feeling of bewilderment that such things once were with us,—that the dalliance of the puppets, and the liquid jargon which they speak, once were our delight, and that we once had the pass-key to that blissful world whose pleasures and whose sorrows now alike fail to interest us.

So in the thorough enjoyment of this new-found happiness, in all tranquillity and repose, as in a calm haven after tempest, three or four days passed over Barbara and Churchill. Their secret was their own, and was doubly dear for being known but to themselves. No one suspected it. Churchill joined the shooting-party on two occa-

sions; but as he had previously been in the habit of detaching himself after luncheon, no one remarked his doing so now, and no one knew that the remainder of the day until dinner-time was spent with Barbara alone. After dinner Barbara would sometimes sing, and then Churchill would hover round the piano, perhaps with more *empressement* than he had previously shown (because, though fond, as every man of any sensitiveness must be, of music, he was by no means an enthusiast, and was racked wofully with smothered yawns during the performance of any elaborate piece), yet by no means noticeably. And during all the time each had the inward satisfaction of knowing that their words and actions were appreciated by the other, and that the "little look across the crowd," as Owen Meredith says, was full of meaning to and thoroughly understood by the person it was intended to reach. At length, about the fourth day after the proceedings at the stile, their conversation took a more practical turn. They had been wandering slowly along, and had at length stopped to rest on a grass-covered bank which was screened

from the sight of the distant house by a thick belt of evergreens, while far away in front of them stretched a glorious prospect of field and woodland. As sometimes happens in October, the sun seemed to have recovered his old July force, and blazed so fiercely that they were glad to sit under the friendly shade. Barbara had removed the glove from her right hand, and sat looking down at her lover, who lay by her side, idly tracing the course of one of the violet veins in the little hand which rested in his own broad palm. Suddenly he looked up and said:

"Darling, this lotus-eating is rapidly coming to an end. It would be sweet enough, thus 'propped on beds of amaranth and moly,' to remain and dream away the time together; but there's the big world before us, and my holiday is nearly finished."

"And you must go back to town?" and the little fingers tightened round his, and the shapely head was bent towards his face.

"Yes, pet; must. But what of that? When I go, it is but to prepare for thee, my heart's

darling; but to set things straight for your reception. You're determined, child, to share my lot at once? You've reflected on what I said the other night, about waiting a year to see whether—"

"No, Frank, no! those long engagements are utterly hateful. There will you be, I suppose" (and she glanced slyly at him), "moping by yourself, and there shall I be with another round of that horrible season before me, thinking of you, longing for you, and yet having to undergo all the detestable nonsense of balls and parties and *fêtes*, which I so thoroughly despise—for what? At the end to find ourselves a year older, and you perhaps a few pounds richer. As though riches made happiness!" said poor Barbara, who, since she had come to what are called years of discretion, had never known what it was to have a whim unindulged.

Churchill raised himself on his elbow, and smiled as he smoothed her glossy hair.

"My child," said he, "have you never heard of the philosopher who, when told that poverty

was no crime, rejoined, 'No; no crime; but it's deuced inconvenient'? Recollect, furnished lodgings in Mesopotamia, hack cabs to ride in, no Parker to dress your hair, no Rotten Row—by Jove, when I think of it, I feel almost inclined to rush off and never see you again, so horrible is the change to which holding to me must lead you!" and a dark shadow passed across his face.

"Do you?" asked Barbara, bending so closely over him that he felt her warm breath on his cheek; "do you?" she repeated, with such a dash of earnest in her jesting tone that Churchill thought it necessary to slip his arm round her, and press his lips to her forehead in reassurance. "Why, you silly boy, you forget that when I was a child at home with papa, I knew what poverty was; such poverty as would make what you speak of wealth by comparison. Besides, shall we not be together to share it? And you'll buy me a—what do they call it?—a cookery book, and I'll learn all kinds of housekeeping ways. I can do some things already; Guérin, the Morrisons' *chef*—who was a little struck with

me, I think, sir—showed Clara Morrison and me how to make an omelette; and Maurice Gladstone—my cousin Maurice, you know; when we were staying at Sandgate, he was quartered at Shorncliffe—taught me to do bashawed lobster, and he says my bashawed lobster is as good as Sergeant Pheeny's. And you know all the Guards are mad to get asked to sup with Sergeant Pheeny, who's a lawyer, you know, and not a soldier-sergeant."

And she stopped quite out of breath.

"'You know' and 'you know,'" said Churchill, mocking her; "I do know Sergeant Pheeny, as it happens, and his bashawed lobster, and that dish and omelettes will doubtless be our staple food; and you shall cook it, and clean the saucepans afterwards, you little goose. However, I tell you candidly, darling, though it sounds selfish, I *dare not* run the risk of losing you, even with all these difficulties before us. As you say, we shall share them together, and—"

"Now, not another word!" said Barbara, placing her hand upon his lips; "there are to

be no difficulties, and all is to be arranged at once. And I think the first thing to be done is for me to speak to my aunt."

"Ay," said Churchill, with rather a dolorous expression of face; "I am afraid that will be what your friend Captain Lyster would call a 'teaser.' Talking about no difficulties—we shall find one there!"

"I do not think so. I am sure, Frank, my aunt has shown special politeness to *you*."

"Yes, darling, politeness of a certain kind to people in my position. Don't frown; I have long since dropped that distinction as between ourselves. But I mean so far as the outer world is concerned, to people in my position—authors, artists, and 'professional people' of all kinds—mixing in society, there are always two distinct varieties of politeness. One, which seems to say, 'You are not belonging to *nous autres;* you are not a man of family and position; but you bring something which is a distinction in its way, and which, so far as this kind of acquaintance goes, entitles you to a proper reception at our hands.'

The other, which says as plainly, 'You don't eat peas with your knife, or wipe your lips with the back of your hand; you're decently dressed, and will pass muster; while at the same time you're odd, quaint, amusing, out of the common run, and you present at my house a sort of appanage to my position.' I think Miss Lexden belongs to the latter class, Barbara."

"I am afraid that old feeling of class-prejudice is a monomania with you," said Barbara, a little coldly: "however, I will see my aunt, and bring matters to an issue there at once."

"All luck go with you, child! There is one chance for us. The old proverb says, '*Femme savante est toujours galante.*' Miss Lexden is a clever woman; perhaps has had her own love-affairs, and will feel pity for ours. But, Barbara, in case she should be antagonistic—violently, I mean—you will not—"

"*Monsieur*," said Barbara, with a little inflated *moue*, "*la garde meurt, mais ne se rend pas*, as Cambronne did *not* say. No, no; trust in me. And now give me your arm, and let us go home."

It was a point of honour with old Miss Lexden to have the best room in every house where she visited; and so good was her system of tactics, that she generally succeeded. Far away in northern castles, where accommodation was by no means on a par with the rank of their owners, duchesses had been worse lodged and infinitely worse attended to than this old commoner, whose bitter tongue and incapacity for reticence did her yeoman's service on all possible occasions; not that she was ever rude, or even impolite, or said any thing approaching to actual savagery; but she had a knack of dropping hints, of firing from behind a masked battery of complacency, and of roughly rubbing "raws," which was more effective than the most studied attacks. As spent balls, when rolling calmly along, as innocuous, apparently, as those "twisters" of Hillyer's, which evade the dexterous "dip" of the longstop on the smooth short sward of the Oval, have been known, when attempted to be stopped, to take off a foot, so did old Miss Lexden's apparently casual remarks, after to all appearance missing their aim, tear and wound and

send limping to the rear any one who rashly chanced to answer or gainsay her. Women, with that strange blundering upon the right so often seen among them, seemed to guess the diabolical power of the old lady's missiles, and avoided them with graceful ease, making gentle *détours*, which led them out of harm's way, or cowering for shelter in elegant attitudes under projecting platitudes; but men, in their conscious self-strength, would often stand up to bear the brunt of an argument, and always came away worsted from the fight. So that old Miss Lexden generally had her own way amongst her acquaintance, and one important part of her own way was the acquisition of the greatest comfort wherever she stayed.

Of course, in an easy, regulated household like that of Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, there was no need of special strategy. Years ago, on her first visit, she had selected her apartments, and had had them reserved for her ever since. Pleasant apartments they were, large, airy, and with a glorious look-out across the garden over the surrounding downs. When the windows were open, as they

always were when practicable during Miss Lexden's tenancy,—for the old lady was a great lover of fresh air,—the rooms were filled with the perfume of the flowers, occasionally mixed with fresh, healthy sea-smell. These had been the state-rooms in the Grange in bygone times; and when Miss Lexden first came there, there was a huge bed, with nodding plumes at the foot, and a great canopy, and high-backed solemn chairs, and a big wardrobe like a family mausoleum; but the old lady had all these cleared away, and persuaded Sir Marmaduke to refurnish the rooms with a suite of light maple and moss-rosebud chintz, with looking-glass let into the panels of the wardrobe, and snug little low chairs scattered about; and then, with a chintz paper, and water-colour drawings in light frames, the place was so changed that the old housekeeper, who had been in the family for years, scarcely knew it again, and was loud in her lamentations over the desecration.

Miss Lexden was a lazy old lady, who always breakfasted in bed, and when staying on a visit at a country-house generally remained the greater

portion of the day in her room. She was accustomed to say with great freedom that she did not amuse the young people, and they certainly did not amuse her, and that she hated all old people except herself. She was a great correspondent of all kinds of people, wrote lengthy epistles in very excellent French to all kinds of refugees, who were perpetually turning up in different parts of Europe, and working the oracle for their own purposes; wrote lengthy epistles to American statesmen on the slavery question, to English lecturers on subjects of political economy, and to her special friends on all points of domestic scandal. I fear that, with the exception of the last, her correspondence was not much regarded, as she never sent to refugees any thing but her blessing and her prayers; and these, even though coming from an English *miladi*, were not discountable at any *Geld-wechsel Comptoir* on the Continent. But her *Chronique Scandaleuse* was delicious; it was bold in invention, full in detail, and always written in the most pointed and epigrammatic style. There were people who obtained autumn invitations on the

sheer strength of their being recipients of Miss Lexden's correspondence. Extracts from her letters were read publicly at the breakfast-table, and created the greatest delight. "Good as a book, by Jove!" was a frequent comment on them; "full of humour, and that kind of thing; sort of thing that fellow writes and people pay money for, by Jove! ought to send it to *Punch*, that she ought." (For it is a thing to be noted, that if the aristocracy of this great country ever permit themselves to be amused, they invariably think that the thing which amused them, no matter of what kind it be, ought to be sent to *Punch*.) Miss Lexden also was a great reader of French novels; she subscribed regularly to Rolandi's, and devoured all that sound sense, morality, philosophy, and extensive knowledge of the world, which yearly issued from the Parisian publishers. In bygone times she had laughed heartily over the farcical humour of M. Paul de Kock; now that her palate had somewhat dulled, Fortune had sent her the titillating works of M. Gustave Flaubert, M. Xavier de Montepin, M. Ernest Feydeau, and others of that modern

school which delights in calling a spade a spade, with the broad theories of M. Proudhon to be her political guide, and the casuistries of M. Renan for her Sunday reading. She read all, but liked the novels best; and had been seen to weep over a yellow-covered volume in which an elegant marquis, all soul and black eyes, a *membre du Jockei-Club*, and altogether an adorable person, had to give satisfaction to a brute of a husband who objected to being dishonoured.

With one of these yellow-covered volumes on her lap, Miss Lexden was sitting placidly in the easiest of chairs at the open window on the afternoon when Barbara and Churchill held the conversation just narrated. She was a pleasant-looking old lady, with a fat, wrinkleless, full face, like an old child, with a shiny pink-and-white complexion, and with hair which defied you to tell whether it had been wonderfully well preserved, or admirably dyed, arranged under a becoming cap. She was dressed in a rich brown moiré-antique silk, and with a black-lace shawl thrown over her ample shoulders; her fat, pudgy little hands,

covered with valuable rings, were crossed over the book on her lap; and she was just on the point of dropping off into a placid slumber, when there came a knock at the door, immediately upon which Barbara entered the room.

"Well, Barbara," said the old lady, stifling a yawn; "is it time to dress? I've done nothing since luncheon but read this ridiculous book, and I was very nearly dropping asleep, and I've no notion of the time; and Withers is always gadding about in this house with that steward, and never comes near me till the last moment."

"It is quite early, aunt; scarcely six o'clock yet; and I came up to you on purpose to have a quiet *cause* with you before you dressed. I think I have news which will keep you awake. You've not asked me of my flirtations lately."

"My dear child, why should I ask? I interested myself about Lord Hinchenbrook because he was the *parti* of the season, and because to have carried him off from that odious doll, that Miss Musters, as you could easily, would have been a triumph to us both; but you refused. I

interested myself about young Chaldecott because our families had long been intimate, and the largest property in Yorkshire is worth interesting oneself about; but you refused. You know your own mind best, Barbara, and *I* know that you have too much good sense and real notion of what is right to do a foolish thing; so I leave you to yourself, and don't worry you with any questions."

"Thanks, aunt, for your good opinion," said Barbara, playing with a sprig of scarlet geranium which she had taken from a vase on the table; "but I shall give you no further trouble. I am going to be married."

"Sir Charles Chaldecott has written?" said the old lady, putting aside the book, and sitting upright in her chair; "has written; and you—?" and in her anxiety Miss Lexden smiled so unguardedly that, for the first time in her life, the gold-settings of her false teeth were seen by a looker-on.

"I—we shall not hear any more of Sir Charles Chaldecott, aunt," said Barbara hesitatingly; "no;

I am going to be married to a gentleman now staying in this house."

Miss Lexden's face fell; the gold teeth-settings disappeared from view entirely; and she shrugged her shoulders as she said, "Very well, my dear; I feared something of the sort. If you like to settle on three thousand a year, and to take a man whose constitution is ruined by the Indian climate, I can only say—it is your affair."

Barbara bit her lips to avoid betraying a smile as she replied, "You are wrong again, aunt. Captain Lyster has never done me the honour of an offer." Then seriously, "I am going to be married to Mr. Churchill."

"*What?*" shrieked the old lady, surprised out of all decorum; "what?" Then, after an instant's pause, "I beg your pardon, Barbara; did I not understand you to say that you were going to be married to Mr. Churchill, the—the gentleman now staying in this house?"

"You did so understand me, aunt, and it is the fact."

"Then," said Miss Lexden, in rather a low,

flat key, "I'll trouble you to ring the bell for Withers. It must be time for me to dress for dinner."

Barbara looked astonished, and would have spoken; but her aunt had risen from her chair and turned her back on her, moving towards the dressing-table. So she mechanically rang the bell, and left the room.

With the result of this conversation Churchill was made acquainted as he and Barbara bent together over a large stereoscope in the drawing-room before dinner. In a few hurried words, interspersed with ejaculations of admiration at the views, uttered in a much louder tone, Barbara conveyed to her lover that their project would meet with no assistance from her aunt, even if that old lady did not actively and violently oppose it. Churchill shrugged his shoulders on hearing this, and looked somewhat serious and annoyed; but as she rose to go in to dinner, Barbara pressed his hand, and looking into her face he saw her eyes brighten and her lip curl with an expression of triumph, and he recognised in an instant that

her energy had risen at the prospect of opposition, and that her determination to have her own way had strengthened rather than lessened from her aunt's treatment.

There was an accession to the dinner-table that day in the person of Mr. Schröder, a German long resident in England, and partner in the great house of Schröder, Stutterheim, Hinterhaus, and Company, bankers and brokers, which had branches and ramifications in all the principal cities of the world. No one would have judged Gustav Schröder to have been a keen financier and a consummate master of his business from his personal appearance. He was between fifty-five and sixty years old, heavy and dull-looking, with short, stubbly, iron-gray hair, dull boiled eyes, and thin dry lips, which he was constantly sucking. He was clumsy in his movements, and very taciturn; but though he spoke little, even to Miss Townshend, by whom he was seated, he seemed to derive intense satisfaction in gazing at her with a proprietorial kind of air which nearly goaded Lyster, sitting directly opposite to them, to despera-

tion. Upon his evidently uncomfortable state Captain Lyster was rallied with great humour by old Miss Lexden, who, however much she may have been inwardly annoyed, showed no signs of trouble. She opined that Captain Lyster must be in love; that some shepherdess on the neighbouring downs, some Brighton *poissarde*, must have captivated him, and she was delighted at it, and it would do him good; and in spite of Lyster's protestations—which, however, he soon gave up when he found he had the trouble of repeating them—the old lady launched out into a very unusual tirade on her part in favour of early marriages, of love-matches made for love's sake alone, which frequently turned out the happiest, "didn't they, Mr. Churchill?" At which question Churchill, who was dreamily looking across the table, and thinking how artistically Barbara's head was posed on her neck, and what a lovely ear she had, stammered an inarticulate and inappropriate reply.

But when dinner was over, and the post-prandial drink finished, and the coffee consumed in the drawing-room, and the "little music"

played, and the ladies had retired to rest (Barbara, in her good night to Churchill, giving one reassuring hand-pressure, and looking as saucily triumphant as before), and the men had exchanged their dress-coats for comfortable velvet lounging-jackets, and had, in most cases, dispensed with their white cravats; when Sir Marmaduke had nodded his farewell for the night, Churchill, instead of joining the party in the smoke-room, made his way to the old gentleman's quarters, and knocked at the dressing-room door. Bidden to come in, he found Sir Marmaduke in his dressing-gown and slippers, seated before a fire (for the evenings were beginning to be chilly), with a glass of cold brandy-and-water on a little table at his right hand, and the evening paper on his knee.

"Holloa!" was the old gentleman's salutation; "what's in the wind now? There must be something the matter when a young fellow like you, instead of joining in the nonsense downstairs, comes to hunt out an old fogey like me. What is it?"

"Business, Sir Marmaduke," commenced Churchill; "I want five minutes' business talk with you."

"God bless my soul!" growled Sir Marmaduke; "business at this time of night, and with *me!* You can't talk without something to drink, you know. Here, Gumble; another tumbler and the brandy for Mr. Churchill. Why don't you talk to Stone, my dear fellow? he manages all my business, you know."

"Yes, yes, Sir Marmaduke; but this is for you, and you alone. I came to tell you that I am going to be married."

"Ay, ay! no news to me, though you think it is. What's his name, Beresford, told us all about it. Well, well, deuced risky business; wish you well through it, and all that kind of thing. Don't congratulate you, because that's all humbug. But why specially announce it to *me?*"

"Simply because it is your due. I met the lady in this house, and the first introduction was through you. I don't know what nonsense Mr. Beresford may have been spreading, but the

real fact is that I am going to be married to Barbara Lexden. Now you see my motive."

"I'm obliged to you, sir," said the old man, rising from his chair and extending his hand; "you've acted like a gentleman, by Jove! like a gentleman and a man of honour. God bless my soul! how I recollect your father, Frank, and how like you are to him! And so you're going to marry little Barbara! not little Barbara now, though. How time flies! A good girl, sir; and a deuced fine girl too, for the matter of that. What does her aunt say to that? She meant her for much higher game than you, young fellow. What does her aunt say? Does she know of it—Does Miss Lexden know of it? I'll wager there'll be 'wigs upon the green,' as poor Dick Burke used to say, when she hears of it."

"Miss Lexden has heard of it, sir," said Churchill, smiling; "and I'm afraid she did not receive the news very auspiciously; but we shall endeavour to gain her consent, and if we fail—well, we must do without it. And now I won't keep you from your paper any longer. I thought

it my duty to tell you, and having done so, I'll say good night."

"One minute, Frank Churchill; wait one minute. I'm a queer, useless old fellow—an old brute, I often think, for I'm not unconscious of the strange life I lead and the odd—but, however, that's neither here nor there. Your father and I were boon companions—a wild, harum-scarum chap he was—and *such* company—and I've a regard for you, which is strengthened by your conduct to-night. My old cousin, Miss Lexden—well, she's an old lady, you know, and she meant Barbara for a marquis, at least; and then old women hate to be disappointed, you know, and she'll be savage, I've no doubt. But when you're once married she won't be difficult to deal with, and so far as I can help you I will. And now, God bless you, and good night; and—give Barbara a kiss for me in the morning."

About the same time another conversation on the same great topic was going on under the same roof. Barbara had scarcely been five minutes in

her room, and had been leaning thoughtfully, with her arms upon the window-sill, gazing out into the moonlit park, and utterly oblivious of Parker, who was preparing the instrument of torture for her mistress's hair, when Withers arrived with a message that Miss Lexden wished to speak to her niece. Obedient to the summons, Barbara crossed the landing, and found the old lady, resplendent in a dark-blue cashmere dressing-gown, seated before her fire. Wither's dismissed *pro tem.*, Miss Lexden said:

"I'll not detain you long, Barbara. I merely wished to know whether what you said this evening about your intended marriage with Mr. Churchill was jest or earnest."

"Thorough earnest," replied Barbara, regarding her stedfastly.

"As to marriage, I mean?" asked the old lady; "not as to a temporary flirtation, which, *faute de mieux*, with a pleasant man in a dull country house, is well enough, and not likely to tell against one's interests. But as to marriage?"

"What I said before, aunt," said Barbara

slowly, never dropping her eyes, "I repeat. Mr. Churchill has done me the honour to ask me to become his wife. I have consented, and I mean to keep my word."

"Ve-ry well," said Miss Lexden, drawing a long breath; "I only wished to know. You are your own mistress, and control your own actions, of course. You have made your choice, and will abide by it. I don't seek to influence you one jot. But, recollect one thing: if I were to see you with broken health, with broken spirits, ill-used, deserted, starving—as is likely enough, for I know these people—I would not lift one finger to help you, after your degradation of me. I have said it, and you know I keep my word. That is all; we will have no quarrel, and give no occasion for shoulder-shrugs and scandal. The sooner your arrangements permit of your quitting my house, the better pleased I shall be. Now, good night. Withers, I am ready now. See Miss Lexden to her room. Good night, dear."

The old lady proffered her enamelled cheek, against which Barbara laid the tip of her nose. And so the aunt and niece separated for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

MOTHER AND SON.

At the drawing-room window of a house in Great Adullam Street, Macpelah Square, in that district of London whilom known as "Mesopotamia," a lady had been sitting from an early hour in the afternoon until now, when twilight falls upon the neighbourhood. This, I am aware, does not particularly fix the hour, because twilight falls upon the Mesopotamian neighbourhood earlier than on any other with which I am acquainted. You leave Oxford Street in a blaze of sunlight, which bit by bit decreases as you progress through the dingy streets and the dull, vast, second-rate squares, until when you enter upon the confines of Great Adullam Street you find the glory of the day departed, a yellow fog settling gloomily down, and the general aspect suicidal. At the time of which I am

speaking, the twilight had been a settled thing for at least an hour,—it was approaching six o'clock. The lamps were lighted, and the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses had pulled their blinds down and settled in for the night; but still at No. 57 the lady sat in the drawing-room window, staring out into the yellow fog. The street lamp flickering on her showed her to be a woman of about sixty years old, with clean-cut regular features, intelligent but sweet expression, and with gray hair—almost white—arranged in broad bands on either side her face. Her dress was black silk, with a soft white-muslin cape pinned across her breast, and on her head she wore a plain white-muslin cap with a little crimped border. On her hands she had black-lace mittens, and she wore a few old-fashioned but valuable rings. A glance at her would have proclaimed her a lady to the most casual observer, a woman of taste and refinement and sensibility to the physiognomist; and a further study would have shown the latter deeply-indented traces of mental anxiety and suffering.

Indeed, Eleanor Churchill's life had not been a

particularly happy one. Daughter of a country clergyman near Bath, she lost both her parents before she was eighteen, and remained in the school where she was being "finished" after their death, giving her services as teacher for her board and lodging. Here she was seen and admired by Vance Churchill, who attended the school as drawing-master; a wild young fellow, full of talent, who worked (at intervals) like a horse, and whose splendid method of touching-up the pupils' drawings, so as to make them look all their own, redeemed many of his shortcomings, and caused him to be continued in favour at Minerva House. But when he fell in love with the pretty teacher, and muttered love to her as he was sharpening pencil-points, and was seen by the writing-master—an old person of seventy, who was jealous of his young *confrère*—to hand her a note in a copy of the *Laws of Perspective*, and on being taxed with his crime acknowledged it and gloried in it, it became impossible for the Miss Inderwicks, as the girls called them, or the Misses Inderwick, as they called themselves, to stand it any longer. So both the delin-

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quents were discharged; and having nothing to live upon, they at once got married, and came up to London. Once there, Vance Churchill set to work with a will: he drew on wood, he lithographed, he drew languishing heads for the music-shops, and caricatures political and social; he finished several elaborate sketches in water-colour and in oil; but he sold scarcely any thing. There was not that demand for art in those days there is now, and consequently not that chance of livelihood for its possessors; and Vance Churchill and his young wife were very near to starvation indeed, and had buried one little girl-baby, who, had luxuries been provided for her, might have lived, when a small picture of Lady Macbeth, which had found a place in the Somerset-House Exhibition, was seen and purchased by Sir Jasper Wentworth, our old friend Sir Marmaduke's uncle and his predecessor in the baronetcy. From that time Vance Churchill's fortune was looked upon as made; for Sir Jasper, who had a nice eye for art, took him up, introduced him right and left, and got him commissions without end. Young Marmaduke, a

free-spoken, jolly young man, coeval with the artist, took an immense fancy to him, and was never happy save in his society; money was, if not plentiful, always to be had,—and Eleanor Churchill was more wretched than she had ever been in the days of her direst poverty.

For though Vance Churchill could struggle against poverty, neglect, and hardship, he could not withstand ease, comparative wealth, and the attractions of society. He was eminently a "social" man; a big, jolly jovial fellow, with bright blue eyes, large brown whiskers, and a splendid set of teeth. He had capital lungs, and sang a capital song in a deep baritone voice, and he had nice feeling in his singing, which so seldom accompanies correct musical execution; but when Vance Churchill sang "Farewell, my trim-built Wherry," or "Tom Bowling," all the female portion of his audience was in tears, while the men felt husky and uncomfortable. He became the rage in a certain set of fast young men about town, and in that pleasant Upper Bohemia wherein so many literary men, artists, and actors

of that day used to spend their time; not a Bohemia of taprooms and sanded floors, of long clay-pipes and spittoons and twopennyworths of gin, nor of Haymarket night-houses and drunken trulls, nor of blind-hooky and *vingt-et-un* parties in dingy chambers; but a Bohemia of green-rooms and *coulisses*, of sparkling little suppers afterwards at Vauxhall, where wit would flow as fast as the champagne, where jokes would be more telling than the hot punch, and whence the mad party would not unfrequently dash away in their carriages to breakfast at the Star and Garter at Richmond, or to drink fresh milk and eat fresh butter in a Hampstead farmhouse. A Bohemia, the denizens of which always would have good clothes and fine linen on their backs, gold watches in their pockets, and guineas in their purses, let who would pay for it; and who roared with laughter at the astonishment of the world at their vagaries, increasing their eccentricities, and saying of the world as Balzac's actress said, "*Qu'importe? donne leur des grimaces pour leur argent, et vivons heureux!*"

Petted and fêted by the style of society in which he revelled, Vance Churchill had yet the grace not to attempt to force his wife to join it; indeed he had good reason for keeping her away. For the ladies liked Vance Churchill vastly, and Vance returned the compliment, and behaved just as though there were no moral and legal ties binding him to any one in particular. He loved his wife sincerely all the time, and in his quiet moments would tear his hair, and stamp upon the ground, and curse his own weakness and folly, and his treatment of that angel who sat patiently at home attending to and teaching their little boy, and who never reproached him save by her pale face and broken spirit; and then, as evening came round, Marmaduke Wentworth would call for him, or the servant would bring him a dainty little note, written in a very scrawly hand, which she would hold in the corner of her dingy apron, and which Vance would seize from her, and after reading it he would sally out, and commence his vagaries *da capo*.

Preaching before Mary Queen of Scots and

her maids of honour, old John Knox is reported to have said: "Oh, how beautiful, how charming, how pleasurable would be this life, *if it would only last!*" These were Mr. Vance Churchill's sentiments, but he soon found that it would *not* last. What the writers of those ghastly impositions, bacchanalian ditties, call "wine and women," or "beauty and the bowl," don't agree with hard work; and if you go to bed at five a.m. after orgies, you will not be able to paint your pictures next day, or to write your book, or mould your clay, or study your part. It is astonishing how slow people are to believe this, and how, year after year, we see friends and acquaintances still determined, not merely upon burning the candle at both ends, but lighting any bit of wick that may protrude in the middle, and quite astonished when they see the flame flicker and feel the whole affair about to collapse. Vance Churchill had plenty of commissions for pictures from first-rate people,—noblemen, connoisseurs, and patrons of art,—but he did not give himself the chances of painting them: his brain was

never clear enough for conception, his hand never steady enough for execution; and the result was, that his financial affairs became desperate. His noble patrons never dreamed of parting with their money until the work was done—and in truth not often then; and there were in those days no middle men, no bland picture-dealers, to advance large sums on untouched canvases; and even if there had been, they would have been far too wise to let Vance Churchill have any money on the strength of "working it out." So the money dwindled and dwindled, and then Vance began borrowing of his friends until he found averted faces and buttoned pockets, and then he faded straight away out of his grand society, and took lodgings at Chelsea, and tried once again to work for his livelihood. He painted one picture, which showed but few traces of his old force and promise. It was plain that the mischief was done; and then Vance Churchill, after steadily drinking for four days, was found one morning with an empty laudanum-phial in his clenched fingers, and a heart-breaking letter to his wife by his side.

Then Eleanor Churchill—who, while perfectly conscious of her husband's frailties and imperfections, had never ceased worshipping him—fairly broke down; and had she not been attended by a skilful physician, and perseveringly nursed night and day by the girl who had been "scrub" at Miss Inderwick's school, and had left when Eleanor left to follow her fortunes, little Frank would have been motherless as well as fatherless. As it was, she recovered, and went away, so soon as she was able to move, to a little fishing-village in Devon, of which an old friend of her father's was vicar. Her income was a mere pittance; contributions from old friends of her husband's family and her own grudgingly yielded; but her expenses were trifling, and the old parson took the boy's education under his own charge, and gave him an excellent classical groundwork. The vicar died when Frank was about fifteen, and left the whole of his little savings—some seven hundred pounds—to Eleanor Churchill, "for the furtherance of her son's education;" and then the widow carried out her long-cherished plan of sending her son to

some foreign university, where, in addition to his Classics, he could perfect himself in some of the modern languages. Frank was absent at Leipzig nearly four years, during which period he paid two flying visits to England, at the second of which he was introduced to his godfather, Sir Marmaduke Wentworth, who had succeeded to the family title on his uncle's death. Frank little thought that one of Sir Marmaduke's first acts on coming into his property had been to settle two hundred a year on Mrs. Churchill for her life; he would hear of no refusal. "It is merely an act of reparation," said he; "and but a scanty one. It was my folly, my bad example, that led poor Vance astray; and I should never rest if I thought that those he left behind him were in want, while I had means." But one condition was attached to this gift, and that was that Frank should never know of it. "I recollect Vance's spirit in his best days," Marmaduke said; "and if the boy is like him, he'd fling my money at my head."

After taking his degree, Frank was fortunate enough to render himself so agreeable to young

Fortinbrass, the son of the great Indian pale-ale brewer, that that young plutocrat insisted on taking him with him as half-secretary, half-bear-leader, in his tour through Europe and the East; and as they stopped at every place where there was any thing to be done, and a good many at which there was nothing to be done, and as they had the usual share of quarantine, and as Fortinbrass took ill at Smyrna and had to lay up for four months, it was full three years before Frank returned to England. Then he determined to settle down and get to work in earnest; and after a few rebuffs and discouragements, philosophically encountered, he made his mark in the press world, and obtained constant and fairly remunerative employment. Then the house in Great Adullam Street was taken, as handy to the *Statesman* office, Frank's head-quarters, and furnished partly with the best of the Devonshire furniture, and partly with odds and ends bought cheap at sales, for the joint income was but small, and Eleanor had a wholesome horror of debt. And then the full tide of Eleanor Churchill's

happiness flowed in: she had loved her husband; she had worshipped his memory in her holy of holies; she had preserved his image, and had bowed down before it; with his death vanished all his shortcomings, but his better qualities—the early affection, kindness, and chivalry—were remembered. But now that her son was with her, the old image faded and rapidly paled. Here was one uniting the excellences of his father with virtues which his father never possessed, tempering high spirits and ardent affection with earnestness, industry, and honour; no mawkish sentimentalist, no prudish Pharisee; a man of passions and impulse, yet a Christian and a gentleman, and above all—her own boy. That was the touchstone; that was the grand secret. He had his flirtations, of course; his intrigues, perhaps; but he was her son, her companion, and she was his honoured mother, but she was also his trusted friend. All his hopes and fears, all the fun and gossip of the day, were brought by him to her; he talked to her on books and art and social questions; he read to her and with her; he ad-

vised her on her own reading, and he brought home with him men of European fame and name, and introduced her to them, and made much of her before them. *If it would only last!* Beware of that, Eleanor Churchill! Some one must reign after you, and with her uprising must be your downsetting. It was ever so. Ask not why tarry the wheels of his chariot, for the news that he brings with him will wring and torture your fond, trusting heart.

The old lady's face, which had grown somewhat worn and rigid in watching, brightened as she heard the sound of wheels in the distance, and as she saw a hansom cab come plunging and rattling over the uneven stones, to be finally pulled up with a jerk before the door.

As Frank Churchill sprang out, he looked up to the window and waved his hand. In a minute he had run up-stairs and was in his mother's arms.

"Why, my boy, how late you are!" said Mrs. Churchill, as she relaxed her embrace. "You must be famished for your dinner, my poor fellow!"

"Excursion-trains, mother, your favourite doc-

trine of health and change for your old *protégé* the working-man, you know, have contributed to your anxiety and my delay. We were stopped at Forest Hill for a train full of people, with drooping hats and feathers and banners and bands and general tomfoolery, who had been having a day at the Crystal Palace."

"Well, so long as you're here, and all safe, that's all the old mother cares about, Frank. Dinner, Lucy, now, at once; Mr. Frank's half-starved. Let me look at you, my boy, and see whether the trip's done you any good. Eh, you're certainly tanned, and a little stouter, Frank, I think."

"Perhaps so, mother, though I've been taking more exercise than usual too. Any news? I saw a pile of letters on the study-table as I rushed past, but I didn't stop to look at them. Any body been?"

"Mr. Harding was here yesterday, to see if you had returned from among the 'swells,' as he called them. I think he's a little envious of your going into such society; eh, Frank?"

"Not a bit of it, mother; nothing would take old George Harding beyond his own set. But he's afraid of my getting my head turned."

"No fear of that in my boy," said Mrs. Churchill somewhat gravely; "there is the difference between you and your poor father, Frank. And now, how is Sir Marmaduke? and what sort of people were staying there? and was he kind and friendly to you? and how did you enjoy yourself?"

As Mrs. Churchill finished speaking, Lucy the old servant entered the room and announced dinner. She was a tall gaunt woman, with a hard unpleasant face, which did not soften much when Churchill, looking up, said, "Well, Lucy, back at home once again, you see."

"Yes, I see, Master Frank," the woman replied coldly. "We've been waiting dinner until we must be faint, I should think."

"But it wasn't Mr. Frank's fault, Lucy," said Mrs. Churchill; "the train was late. Now, my boy, come; you must be starved in earnest;" and they went down-stairs.

"We've not got such a dinner for you as you've been having lately, maybe," said Lucy, as she uncovered the dishes. "But you can't be always among lords and ladies, Master Frank."

"Lucy, you silly thing!" said Mrs. Churchill, half-laughing, but looking half-ashamed.

"I've not been among them at all, Lucy, for the matter of that," said Churchill good-humouredly, though his brow began to cloud.

"Well," said the woman, leisurely handing the dishes, "it's not for the want of wishing. Here we are, left at home, in the hot autumn weather; while you—"

"Lucy!" exclaimed Mrs. Churchill.

"Be good enough to leave the room," said Churchill; "this minute!" he said, bringing his hand heavily down on the table, as the woman lingered, looking towards her mistress. "Why, mother darling, what is this?" he asked, when they were alone; "that woman's tongue was always free, and her manner always familiar; but this is quite a new experience."

"It is, my child," said poor Mrs. Churchill;

"I don't know how to excuse her, except that it is all done out of excess of affection for me, and—"

"That's quite enough excuse for me, mother," said Churchill, rising, and kissing her. "There, now we'll change the conversation;" and they talked merrily enough on indifferent topics throughout dinner.

When the cloth was removed, and after Frank had produced his old meerschaum, and had drawn up his chair to the newly-lighted bit of fire, he said to his mother, "I've some news to tell you, mum."

"Tell it, my boy!" said the old lady, settling her gold-rimmed glasses on her nose, and beginning to make play with a portentous piece of knitting; "what is it, Frank?"

"Well, it's news that concerns both of us," said Churchill, slowly puffing at his pipe, "but me more especially. The fact is, mum—I'm going to be married!"

It had come at last! that news which she had dreaded so many years past, that news which spoke to her of separation from all she loved,

which heralded to her the commencement of a new existence—had come at last! Her heart seemed to give one great bound within her breast as the words fell upon her ears, and her eyes were for an instant dimmed; then recovering herself, she smiled and said, "To be married? that is news indeed, my boy!"

"Ay, mother, my turn has come at last. I thought I had settled down into a regular old bachelor, but I believe that is just the state of mind in which one is most liable to infection. However that be, I have caught it, and am in for it, as badly as any young lad of twenty."

Mrs. Churchill had risen from her seat, and crossed the room to Frank. Putting her hand lightly on his head, she then flung her arms round him and kissed him warmly, saying, "God bless you, my darling boy, and grant you happiness! God bless you, my son, my own son!" and she fairly broke down, and the tears coursed down her cheeks.

"Why, mum!" said Churchill, gently caressing her; "why, mum!" continued he, stroking

her soft gray hair with one hand, while the other was wound round her. "You must not do this, mum. And here's a mother for you! I declare she has never yet asked who or what the lady is!"

"That will come presently, darling; just now I am only thinking of you—thinking how different it—how, after so long—how strange—there, come now, and tell me all about it;" and with one great effort Mrs. Churchill composed herself, and sat down by her son's side to hear his story.

That story lasted far into the night. Frank told of all his hesitation; of his determination not to propose; of the accident that brought about the great result of his happiness; and of the manner in which the affair was viewed by old Miss Lexden. He then said that he and Barbara were determined upon getting married at once, and that he had come up to town principally with the view of looking out some lodgings which he could take in the neighbourhood for them to return to after their honeymoon. His mother listened patiently throughout, with her calm, earnest eyes

fixed upon his face, and only now and then commenting in a low tone; but when he finished, she laid her hand on his and said quietly:

"You will bring your bride *here*, Frank, and I will go into the lodgings. Henceforth this house is yours, my boy! You are the head of our family now, and I—so long as I'm near you and can see you from time to time, what more do I want? So long as you are happy, I am happy, and—"

"But you don't imagine, mother, I'm going to turn you out, and—"

"There's no turning out in the case, my darling. Lucy and I could not occupy the house by ourselves, and we shall be much better in lodgings. Besides, we won't have any one say that you had not a house of your own to bring your wife to. I shall see her soon, Frank? Do you think she'll like me, my darling? When she knows how I love you, I am sure she will; and yet I am not certain of that. You'll come and see me often, won't you, Frank? and—oh, my boy, my own darling boy!" and she fell on his neck and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVI.

"FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE."

When Churchill returned to Bissett, he found that a considerable change had taken place in the aspect of affairs there. Beresford and Lyster had departed, and old Miss Lexden was on the point of starting that very afternoon, her natty boxes in their leather cases lining the hall; for the old lady was calmly implacable, and never altered one jot of her original determination. After his talk with Frank Churchill, Sir Marmaduke had determined on using his best efforts towards restoring peace, and setting affairs on an amicable footing; so the next morning, when he was closeted with Major Stone discussing various points of business, the old gentleman gradually wore round to the matter perplexing him, took Stone into his confidence, and finished by commanding the Major immediately to

seek a conference with Miss Lexden, to inform her of Sir Marmaduke's views, and use his best efforts to bring her at least to a compromise. The gallant warrior received the commission with a very ill grace. He hinted that to look after his friend's rents and tenants, farm and live-stock, servants and money-matters, was all well enough; but to have to collogue with a parcel of old cats who—however, since it was to be done, he supposed he must do it; and he would "tackle" the old lady at once. But the old lady carried far too many guns for this blundering half-pay Major, and before he had been in her company five minutes made him feel exceedingly sorry that he had asked for the interview. Miss Lexden received him in the pleasantest manner, talked lightly of the weather, praised in the highest terms Major Stone's admirable management of Sir Marmaduke's estate, could not imagine how Sir Marmaduke would get on without his "other self;" and then, when Stone's flattered vanity led him to disclose the real object of his visit, Miss Lexden pulled up short, and in her most dignified and icy manner de-

clared that "these *were* family matters, which allowed of no intervention by a third person, especially one entirely unconnected with either side, and therefore incapable of appreciating the delicacies of the position; what, for instance, would Sir Marmaduke have thought of her if she had sent Withers to enter into negotiations!" and thus having completely upset the Major, Miss Lexden summarily dismissed him.

When he returned to his principal, and gave him a full account of his treatment, the old gentleman was very wrath, and took a speedy opportunity of waiting personally upon Miss Lexden.

After exchanging ordinary civilities, their conversation was short and sharp.

"Susan! you're behaving sillily, worse than sillily, in this matter of Barbara and Frank Churchill; and I've come to tell you of it!"

"It's not the first time, Marmaduke, that you have come to me on a fool's errand."

First blood to Miss Lexden: the old man thought of the days of his courtship, when he owed but little to Susan Lexden's assistance, and winced.

"Thank you! You're kind and generous as ever! But it was not to talk of bygone times that I came here. Take my word, Susan, you're wrong in your treatment of this business."

"As how, pray?"

"You've played for a big stake with Barbara, and she won't have it! She's fallen in love, in real desperate love; no make-believe humbug, but regular love!"

Miss Lexden shrugged her shoulders, raised her eyebrows, and tattooed impatiently with her foot.

"God knows she's to be envied," said the old gentleman; "how many girls are there, do you think, who are booked for marriage before next spring, who would give their ears to feel to their future husbands as Barbara does to hers? It's not about her I'm come to preach, it's about you. You're behaving like an idiot, Susan,—worse than an idiot,—in thus refusing your countenance to the match."

"You're growing horribly coarse in your language, Marmaduke, and unfit for me to listen to.

But, since you've broached the topic, hear me: I shall leave Bissett at once; and once gone, I shall never see Barbara again. I shall not give her one sixpence for her *trousseau*, or make one addition to her wardrobe. I will not allow her a penny, and I will strive to forget that I ever knew there was such a person on earth. She has grievously disappointed me, and been selfish and ungrateful; but I shall not cast her off, or do any thing melodramatic or nonsensical; I shall simply ignore her existence, and live on as though she had never been."

Sir Marmaduke retired, boiling over with rage. An hour afterwards he sent for Barbara to the library, and placing a cheque for 100*l.* in her hands, told her he had arranged with Mrs. Vincent to accompany her to town and get the requisite articles for her *trousseau* at once. Her aunt was about to leave, he said; but Mrs. Vincent had promised to stop and act *chaperon*, and Miss Townshend would be bridesmaid. Let the wedding take place at once, since both the young people wished it, and let it be from Bissett. There

would be no fuss, no tomfoolery; but no one should be able to say in future that there was any thing underhand or secret about her marriage, or that it was not properly countenanced by some of the family. If her aunt chose to be an old fool, that was her look-out, not his. And then the old gentleman kissed her on the forehead, and told her that while he lived she and Frank should never want a friend.

Miss Lexden left on the evening of the day on which Churchill returned, without seeing him or taking farewell of any of the household. Mr. Townshend would have liked to go too, but his daughter strongly objected, determining to remain with Barbara; a determination in which she was well supported by Mr Schröder, who had taken great interest in Barbara's "love-affair" ever since it had been made public—as apparently seeing therein an excess of romance which might cast a halo over his own somewhat meagre and prosaic wooing. Mrs. Vincent, too, entered into the affair with great spirit, principally incited thereto by her hatred of old Miss Lexden, who had been

particularly rude about Mr. Vincent's little gastronomical tastes; and Sir Marmaduke seemed for a time to have eschewed his eccentricity, and to have become perfectly humanised. Of course Major Stone was in great force, rallying the lovers with much subtle humour, and looking after all the preparations for the wedding with as much interest as though he were a person principally concerned.

The day arrived, and the weather did its very noblest for the young people. The sky was cloudless, and the sun brilliant, if not warm. Barbara was in the finest health and spirits, and never looked more lovely than in her plain white-silk dress and Brussels lace—the latter an old family relic. The wedding took place at the little parish-church, where three bells rang a somewhat abbreviated but merry peal, while the villagers thronged the churchyard and did proper obeisance and gratulation to a party coming from "the Grange." Afterwards there was a breakfast, at which no one save the clergyman and the house-inmates were present, where there was only one speech of four words,—"God bless

them both!" from Sir Marmaduke; and then, kisses and hand-shakings done, they departed. As Churchill shook hands with the old gentleman, the latter left an envelope in his godson's hands, which, on opening, he found to contain a bank-note for fifty pounds, with the words "For the honeymoon" in the envelope. Nor had Barbara been without her presents. On the previous evening she had received a packet containing a necklace of ivy-leaves in dead deep-coloured gold, with earrings to match, and in the case Captain Lyster's card, with "With all good wishes" written on it; while a splendid enamel and diamond bracelet came to her as the joint gift of Mr. Schröder and Alice Townshend.

While the happy couple were honeymooning it in the north of Devon, unconsciously standing as capital models of posed figures to several artists who had lingered beyond most of their fraternity in those pleasant quarters, old Mrs. Churchill, having engaged a tolerably neat lodging not far from her old abode, devoted herself

and some of her savings to the embellishment of the house in Great Adullam Street, which was newly painted outside, and revived within to the extent of new carpeting and a general polishing of the furniture. Intelligence of these triumphs had been duly conveyed in letters to Frank, who, in return, thanked his mother, and sent a postscript by Barbara, who, addressing her as "her dear mother," begged her not to overfatigue herself in their service; which little message, signed "Your affectionate daughter, B. C," brought tears of delight into the old lady's eyes, and had the effect of causing her to redouble her exertions. At last the day for their return arrived, and the rain, which had been threatening for nearly a week past, broke through the yellow canopy of fog hanging over London, and came down heroically. It was not favourable weather in which to make one's first acquaintance with Great Adullam Street, which required a good deal of sunlight to do away with its normal ghastliness; and as the evening twilight, drear and dim, came rolling up, Eleanor Churchill,

sitting at the window of her lodgings on the look-out for the cab, which must pass her door, felt her heart sink within her with a strange, indefinable sensation of dread. Her delicacy had prevented her being present on her new daughter's first arrival at her home; but she now almost regretted that she had not gone round to welcome her among her new and strange surroundings. Great Adullam Street very seldom had a cab rattling over its ill-set stones; there was a large gate at one end (as is frequently the case in the neighbourhood), where every public vehicle was stopped, and sent by a different route, at the mandate of a very sullen gate-keeper, unless it happened to be bound to some house in the street. So that when Mrs. Churchill heard the creaking gates open, followed by the noise of wheels, she knew that her children had arrived, and looking out, saw by the lamplight Barbara's handsome face at the cab-window. "Handsome, very handsome and patrician-looking," thought the old lady; "but what a strange look of bewilderment on it!"

The cab stopped, and Churchill jumped out and handed Barbara into the house. Lucy, old Mrs. Churchill's servant, stood within the door, and gave a very grim bow as Barbara passed; the two newly-hired servants were smirking in the passage. Frank hurried past them, and led Barbara into the little dining-room. She was very tired with her journey, and at once sat down.

"Who was that horrid person, Frank, at the door,—with the strange sour look, I mean?"

"Oh, my mother's servant, old Lucy; been with her since her girlhood. She has not prepossessing manners, but she's a faithful creature. You'll make much of her, dearest."

"Nothing, I should hope; she's too horrible! What a disagreeable colour this paper is, and what a horribly prim carpet! I'll take off my things, Frank, at once, and come down to dinner; I'm rather faint."

Churchill lit a candle, and preceded her up the stairs,—at the carpet on which Barbara made a despairing shrug—to the best bedroom, erst his

mother's, where stood the heavy four-post bed, the old-fashioned mahogany wardrobe, the dingy pictures of sacred subjects—all the furniture just as he recollected it for years. It was rather a ghastly room, certainly; and when Frank had left her, to go down and pay the cabman and see about the luggage, she glanced nervously round, and burying her face in her hands, burst into a flood of tears.

Thus her husband found her when he returned. He at once rushed up to her, and asked her what was the matter; but she replied that she was a little over-fatigued, and would be better after the dinner and rest.

"That's well," said Frank cheerfully; "you must not give way now, darling; recollect you're *at home.*"

At which words, strange though it may appear, Barbara's sobs were redoubled.

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